Charles Dickens

Hard Times

CHARLES DICKENS

HARD TIMES

[A CRITICAL STUDY]

By
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RS. 20.00

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1

Charles Dickens—A Short Biographical Sketch

Birth and childhood. Charles Dickens was born on the 7th February 1812 at Portsea, near Portsmouth, where his father was a clerk in the Navy Pay Office. From Portsea the family moved to Chatham when Dickens was three years old ; his father had been promoted and was now at the government dockyard there. For a few years all went well. The family had two servants, one of whom named Mary Weller, used to tell Dickens horrifying stories which gave him nightmares.

His boyhood ; and his ambition. From Dickens's own autobiographical notes we get several glimpses of him as a boy. He was able to visit the theatre, to buy books, and steep himself in eighteenth century fiction both picaresqe and sentimental. Already he began to harbour dreams of acquiring the education of a gentleman and saw himself through the world of books, becoming the heir of the centuries and moving with ease among the great writers of the past. But something happened rudely to disturb this dream.

Poverty and work in a Blacking Factory. His father John Dickens, lived consistently beyond his means, got hopelessly into debt, and was recalled to London. Charles, ignorant of the desperate circumstances of his family, followed and found them living in one of the poorest streets. In February 1824 his father was arrested for debt and taken to the Marshalsea prison. The family situation was now almost critical ; there was no money to buy bread and the boy was forced to pawn his precious books one by one. But worse was to come—an experience so bitter and humiliating that it continued to haunt him throughout his life. His parents found a job for him in Warren's Blacking Factory owned by a relative. For six months, in utter despair, Charles, still little more than a child, worked in the dirty, rat-infested old house, sticking labels on blacking bottles. This was the first raw impact of life on the sensitive nerves of a boy who had lived in a dream world. From a psychological point of view, the boy experienced a sense of complete betrayal by those from whom he expected love and protection.

The callousness of his mother. When his father left prison, Charles thought that this would mean an end to his own shame and degradation. But the family were in no hurry to take the boy away from gainful employment, and he remained in the factory until his father quarrelled with the relative who owned it and the boy was removed. Even then his mother was in favour of patching up the quarrel and sending the boy back. Charles could never forget throughout his life this attitude of his mother. Years later, when he was a man, he always tried to avoid the locality where that particular factory was situated, and he never forgave his mother.

The painful experiences of early life. After leaving the factory, Charles resumed his schooling at Wellington House Academy. But the mischief had beed done. In the depths of his nature a split had occurred ; a sensitive, delicate boy had been plunged into experiences that could not have been endured by somebody tough and obstinate. The vision of a world of grim, twisted shapes, deformed, exaggerated caricatures, a world full of horrid images, impressed itself permanently upon the soul of a child. It was thus that he always continued to see the Victorian scene. Loving beauty, he had, during his childhood, been forced into contact with the seamier side of life, with dirt, squalor, shame, and humiliation. The resulting disgust and utter hopelessness were ineradicable. He had seen the sordid underworld of London, inhabited by men and women, diseased in mind and body, where the victims of some vast, incomprehensible system were oppressed and destroyed.

An office-boy and then a shorthand-writer. Dickens left school when he was fifteen. He took up a job as an office-boy in a firm of solicitors. He proved himself extremely useful but he soon realized that this kind of work could only be a temporary phase for a young man of his energies and ambitions. After his day's work at the office, he started learning shorthand in the evenings and acquired amazing proficiency in it. In eighteen months he left the solicitors' office and became a professional shorthand-writer. To begin with he got a job in a court of law where he acquired much of his knowledge of the intricacies of the law, as well as his contempt for it, and became also familiar with legal characters who are found in abundance in his novels.

Acting as a hobby. But shorthand was not his only interest. During his spare time he visited the theatres and music-halls of London. As a small child, standing on the kitchen table, he had entertained his father's friends with comic songs. He was a born entertainer. Acting in plays now became one of his hobbies, and his famous public readings from his novels in his later life were a form of acting

As a press reporter. Soon, because of his great speed and accuracy in shorthand, he became a reporter in that Press Gallery of the House of Commons. He was just twenty at that time. He made a tremendous success of his new job. One of his colleagues said that he occupied the very highest rank, not merely for accuracy in reporting but for a marvellous quickness in transcript. Another colleague wrote : "There never was such a shorthand-writer." From the Press Gallery of the House of Commons he looked down on the final parliamentary skirmishes over the Reform Bill of 1832 ann in doing so earned twentyfive guineas a week. He developed as low an opinion of Parliament as he had previously formed of courts of law.

Sketches of London characters. A year later Dickens took to original writing. He began with brief sketches of London characters he had come across in his hours of wandering about the city. He signed these sketches "Boz", which was his nickname for his young brother, derived from the child's mispronunciation of Moses. He had also been now appointed to the regular staff of a newspaper ; he reported parliamentary proceedings when the House was in session ; and he travelled up and down the country covering elections, great political meetings, and other events.

The famous author of "Pickwick Papers". His first book, *Sketches by Boz* appeared in 1836. It met an enthusiastic reception as the work of a new humorist. His next work, which appeared in monthly instalments, was *Pickwick Papers*. This book made Dickens instantaneously famous, chiefly on account of its character of Sam Weller. Dickens was at this time only twentyfour. It is doubtful, says one of Dickens's biographers, if any other single work had ever before aroused such wild and widespread enthusiasm in the entire history of literature as *Pickwick Papers* had done. With each new novel that Dickens now wrote, his fame grew, until before he died he was probably the most widely known living Englishman.

His country's conscience. Dickens proved himself to be not only the greatest entertainer of his age, not only his country's greatest novelist ; he was, as perhaps none had been before, his country's conscience. He spoke for millions ; and in an age of very great men he was recognized as the most outstanding of them all. Certainly he excelled all of them in his restless, almost fierce energy. His novels did not occupy all his attention ; he also edited magazines, produced plays and acted in them ; he travelled extensively not only in England, but in Europe and America ; he delivered endless speeches, sponsoring charitable causes. His energy was, indeed, boundless.

Marriage ; love-affair ; separation. In 1836 Dickens had married a twentyone-year old girl, Catherine Hogarth. The marriage proved a failure. In April 1856 Dickens wrote to his friend John Forster, "Poor Catherine and I are not made for each other and

there is no help for it." By this time, fed up with Catherine, he had also fallen in love with Ellen Ternan, a pretty young actress whom he had come to know well in the course of rehearsals of plays in which Dickens was so interested as a hobby. In may 1858 Dickens separated from his wife. She had borne him nine children. After the separation, most of the children remained with Dickens and his household was managed by his sister-in-law, Georgina Hogarth.

Public readings from his novels. At the age of fortysix he also embarked on what became almost a second career; he began to read passages and scenes from his novels to large audiences in Britain and America. He acted all the roles in turn and threw himself into them with a tremendous zeal. His public readings had a hypnotic effect on his audiences, but these readings exerted an enormous strain on his mind. In the end he had to give up these public readings, and he retired to Gad's Hill to write *Edwin Drood*, which might be described as a psychological thriller but which he could not complete.

Sudden death. His death was sudden and dramatic. On the 9th June 1870 he had put in a long day on *Edwin Drood*, when he had a stroke at dinner. He got up from the table in a stunned condition and said that he had to go to London at once. Then he fell to the floor and never recovered consciousness. He died the next afternoon. He was buried with pomp in Westminster Abbey, an honour which he fully deserved.

2

The Major Novels of Charles Dickens

1. *Pickwick Papers* (1837)
2. *Oliver Twist* (1839)
3. *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839)
4. *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840-41)
5. *Barnaby Rudge* (1840-41)
6. *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1844)
7. *Dombey and Son* (1848)
8. *David Copperfield* (1850)
9. *Bleak House* (1853)
10. *Hard Times* (1853)
11. *Little Dorrit* (1857)
12. *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859)
13. *Great Expectations* (1860)
14. *Our Mutual Friend* (1864)
15. *Edwin Drood* (Incomplete, and published posthumously)

3

Charles Dickens as a Novelist : Critical Approaches

I

Loose plots in the first phase. Dickens sprang suddenly into fame with *Pickwick Papers* and at twentyfive found himself the most popular of English novelists. Technically considered, his work falls into two chronological divisions. He began as a follower of the tradition of Smollett whom as a child he had read with great enthusiasm and who may, in a sense, be regarded as his master ; and his early novels—*Pickwick Papers*, for instance, and *Nicholas Nickleby* are, like Smollett's, bundles of adventures connected, so far as they are connected at all, only by the characters who figure in them. In *Martin Chuzzlewit*, *Dombey and Son*, and *David Copperfield*, some effort is made towards greater unification, but even these books belong substantially to the loose, chronicle type. *Bleak House* may be said to open his second period, because here for the first time we find a systematic attempt to gather up all the diverse trends of the story into a coherent plot. It cannot be held that Dickens was very successful with his plot-building, and even in his later books there is still a great deal of merely episodical material. But it was in accordance with this changed structural method that the novels written after *Bleak House*—*Little Dorrit*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Great Expectations*, *Our Mutual Friend*—were planned.

An excellent story-teller. Dickens has the double distinction of being the best story-teller of his time and the most versatile and amusing creator of characters. It is not merely that his plots are well managed in the interest of mystery and suspense ; more important is that something is always happening on his stage whether or not any progress is actually made with the plot. Among writers of weight, Dickens allots the least space to explanation and comment. His motto was to let the story tell itself ; and in him fiction was almost for the first time completely differentiated from history, philosophy, memoir, and moral essay. More than any other single factor, this accounts for the vast lead of Dickens over Thackeray in popular appeal. Of course he would not be a Victorian

if he did not colour his narrative heavily with morality and pathos; but he almost invariably manages to dramatize these elements so that they do not give the impression of being off-stage. The pathos was like the incidental music to a moving picture of which we are conscious only as a heightening of the sentimental tone.

His weakness and strength in plot-construction. In the novels of Dickens it is not the most elaborately worked-out plots that are the most satisfactory. Where the thesis is stressed, as in the historical and in the purely social novels (*Barnaby Rudge*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Hard Times*), we feel that too rigid an intention is at work; and that this effect towards a concentration on a single purpose makes the whole book somewhat strained. Dickens does not possess the gift of compact logical or artistic writing. The type of narrative which best suits his inventive genius savours very much of the old picaresque model; his favoured theme is that of life, a life which lasts, which renews itself and which is born, as it were, of itself. In the opening chapters of *Pickwick*, the connecting thread is the most slender; later it gains strength without allowing the reader to forget the purely comic purpose with which the book began; and a plot revolving round the biography of a central character (as in *Nicholas Nickleby*, *David Copperfield*) imparts a supple unity to the best novels. In his later work Dickens endeavoured to tighten this rather lax construction; *Great Expectations* is a novel of a strong and sober texture, which takes a place apart from all the rest.

II

Dickens's personal experiences behind his stories and themes. In any consideration of Dicken's themes, we cannot overlook the early circumstances of his own life that haunted him to the end. The fact that both his paternal grandparents were domestic servants, though in the houses of noblemen, would be enough to explain the constant recurrence in the novels of shabby-genteel; and another circumstance that may have counted heavily with him was the fact that his maternal grandfather had been an embezzler. Then there were his father's shiftlessness and their moving, during Charles's childhood, to more and more wretched lodgings, until finally they moved into the debtors' prison. Not the least of Charles's grievances against his father must have been the latter's cheerfulness under such humiliations, and a sort of snobbish obliquity of nature. At any rate that is what we have in the second figure based on this experience, that odious, grandiose father of the Marshalsea, who was the shame as well as the pride of Little Dorrit; the first, of course, was the more genial Micawber of *David Copperfield*. But surest of all is the grudge that Dickens felt against both his father and his mother for neglecting his education and setting him to the degrading work of Warren's Blacking. It is easy to see why Dickens thought so much of neglected children, or

orphans made wealthy by legacies that could not be accepted because they came from a tained source (*Great Expectations*); of children who ran away from cruel stepfathers to find shelter with Betsy Trotwoods; why he dwelt so much on persons crippled by prison life and hunted by murderous impulses or by the need to establish themselves beyond reach of shame and proverty.

An apostle of humanitarianism because of his personal experiences. The unforgettable experience of his early youth —that humiliating phase of his life—became one of the decisive elements in the formation of his personality. Even when those hardships had been left behind, Dickens could never forget them. It was this memory, at the secret core of his very life-success, that continued to sustain the energy of his effort to secure his material independence and economic security against all risks. It helped also to intensify the multiple suggestion of active charity which made Dickens an apostle, and turned his work into a gospel of humanitarianism.

III

The development of Dickens as a novelist. The earlier novels of Dickens were mostly simple in structure. His favourite authors were Smollett and Le Sage, and he seems to have been inclined to build his own novels like theirs, on the picaresque plan. In most of them we begin with the hero in childhood and follow his personal adventures into the thick of a plot involving the popular romantic material of the day, kidnapping, murder, mob-justice and other incidents of criminal life. When the author needs the usual characters of the novel, a pair of conventional lovers, for example, he gives us figures as weak and unnatural as were many of Scott's heroes. In his later books, however, Dickens gained the power of constructing elaborate plots, and of creating characters of heroic dignity and tragic intensity, such as Sidney Carton in *A Tale of Two Cities* and Lady Dedlock in *Bleak House*. These are the most enduringly powerful of his novels, but they are not those upon which his fame rests. Dickens is remembered not as a dramatic artist in the novel form, but as a showman of wonderful resources. He is the master of a vast and fascinating stage, crowded with farcical characters, with grotesque and terrible creatures, and with the touching forms of little children.

Dickens's version of the picaresque. After the preliminary exercise of *Sketches by Boz*, Dickens started out in *Pickwick Papers* (1837) with his hilarious version of the picaresque, in which Merry England is very much in the ascendant, with vice and crime in their more ludicrous aspects serving merely to heighten the satisfaction we obtain from simplicity and goodness of heart, and the mischances of life serving to give zest to its moments of jovial well-being. The members of the Pickwick Club are men of good-will, whose only weakness lies in the exaggerated view they take of

their own importance. Mr. Pickwick partakes as much of Uncle Toby and Parson Adams as of anyone in the fiction of Smollett. Mr. Wardle is Father Christmas himself. Mr. Jingle and Rachael Wardle are but characters in a pantomime. The dignity of human nature in this novel takes a fall as regularly as in a Charlie Chaplin film, and picks itself up as regularly as there. Mr. Pickwick maintains his philosophic composure even in a wheel-barrow. The picaresque continues to fill many a page of later novels, as in *Nicholas Nickleby* and *the Old Curiosity Shop*, but never in so carefree a vein as in *Pickwick Papers*.

The sorrows and terrors of children. In *Oliver Twist* (*1838*) appears the lifelong pre-occupation of Dickens with the tragic sorrows and terrors of children, which were to play so large a part in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, *Dombey and Son*, *David Copperfield*, *Little Dorrit*, and *Great Expectations*, together with his concern with crime and villainy, already anticipated in the interspersed tales of *Pickwick Papers*, which casts its gloom over *Oliver Twist*, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, *Bleak House*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*.

The themes of crime, vice, social abuses, etc. Dickens's attitude towards crime, like that of most literary artists, was highly complex. Dickens was drawn to crime by the mere fascination of the ugly and perverse, by the opportunities it gives to a writer for exploiting the sensations of mystery, suspense, and terror, and for throwing the cheerful elements into high relief. He was fond of showing the tragic retribution that follows on crime, and was particularly impressed by the thought of the criminal as hunted by evil. Sometimes he was content with the mere aesthetic thrill induced by the spectacle of grotesque monstrosity. But more often crime and villainy take their place among social phenomena as inevitable effects of evil in the social body. Nancy Sikes and the Magwitches are bred to crime as to an honest trade, or driven into it by poverty, ignorance, and injustice. In *A Tale of Two Cities* it is an entire system of legalized oppression that lies behind the picturesque horrors of the French Revolution. Most obvious of Dickens's social intentions was the satirical exposure of particular institutions that were held to blame for much of the vice and misery of the time. In *Oliver Twist* it is the inhumanity of the Poor Law; in *Nicholas Nickleby*, that of schools in which poor children were abandoned to the greed of ignorant exploiters; in *Bleak House* the withering effect on character of the law's delays; in *Little Dorrit* the red tape of Civil Service ("Circumlocution Office"). The evils of prison life are a frequent subject. *Little Dorrit* develops the theme of imprisonment for debt.

A criticism of social structures. The hard hearts of scheming men, who pursue their profit with ruthless disregard for the sufferings of those they ruin, contribute much to the pathos of many

novels, beginning with *Nicholas Nickleby*. With *Dombey and Son* this device takes the form of a conscious theme round which everything in the story is organized. Here and in *Hard Times* it is not some abuse of government, some social agency capable of being reformed, that Dickens attacks, but the very basic assumptions, the characteristic ideology, of industrial England. *Hard Times* is a dramatization of what Carlyle took to be the meaning of utilitarianism, of the orthodox liberal system of *laissez faire*. Thus from the moralist and maker of pantomimes, Dickens begins to emerge, but does not quite emerge, as a radical critic, of social structure.

IV

Dickens, the humorist. The art of Dickens has a deep human quality. The chief instruments of this art being tears and laughter, and above all the poignancy and flavour of their fusion, Dickens is a prominent figure in the line of English humorists. His humour, that is to say, is rich because it is formed of intense elements, his sensibility being keenly alive to the moving signifiance as well as to the odd nature of things. But this alone would not constitute humour, if it did not contain a principle of self-control, the faculty to dominate and to mix, according to the preferences of an intuitive art, the successive complementary impulses of his being. As a humorist, Dickens is amenable to discipline, to a psychological duality, one side of his mind watching the other. It is due to the presence of this salutary element that his art, threatened in other respects with a too definite romanticism, acquires restraint, dignity, and the complexity of manifold planes which otherwise it might have lacked.

His principal gifts and his limitations. Among the English novelists Dickens is neither the most consummate artist, nor the finest psychologist, nor the most accomplished realist, nor the most seductive of storywriters ; but he is probably the most national, the most typical and the greatest of them all. In his own sphere, there is none in his time who can approach him.

The principal qualities of Dickens's novels are his irresistible humour, his unsurpassed descriptive power, and the astonishing vitality of his characterization. It has to be admitted that the range of his success in characterization is very limited ; and it may be doubted whether even his humorous creations, where his great achievements lay, belong in any sense to the world of realities. Character in his novels was generally heightened into caricature. Yet the fact remains that no other writer in English literature, except only Shakespeare, ever created so many men and women who have become permanent elements of the English humorous tradition. Dickens's principal fault was the over-wrought quality of much of his emotion. It is here that he has suffered most from changes of taste. In his craving after effect he continually had recourse

to heavily-loaded emphasis and, as a result, his work became crude. He loved melodrama, and his melodrama was too frequently theatrical ; in his many passages of studied sentiment and pathos he was often extravagant and mawkish.

V

A supreme entertainer. Dickens's friend, the novelist Wilkie Collins, had a formula for the writing of successful fiction which he summed up in the words : "Make them laugh, make them cry, make them wait." ("Them" were the public or the readers). For much of his career this formula was Dickens's too. He had begun, in *Pickwick*, with making them laugh; in *Oliver Twist* his main concern was to make them cry and make them wait. Thereafter he set out to mingle the weeping and the laughter ; no later novel is quite as innocent as *Pickwick* or quite as black as *Oliver Twist*. Dickens was a supreme entertainer, we might even say a one-man entertainment-industry. He sought an immediate response from his readers, and since his novels were mostly published first of all as serials, he could judge the response of his readers from month to month. When sales fell, prompt action on his part was necessary, even if the action was of a kind that fitted ill with the novel which he was writing The best instance of this is probably in *Martin Chuzzlewit* where, when public interest in the story began to decline, he suddenly, for the sake of novelty, sent Martin to America.

An improviser in his early fiction. For a considerable part of his career, then, Dickens wrote as an improviser, caring little about unity of plot or probability except loosely to tie up the ends of the action in the last chapter. So his novels, those of the first half of his career especially, are often like shapeless bags into which all kinds of different object of different shapes and sizes have been indiscriminately packed. They contain something for everybody ; and the parts one does not like, one may more or less ignore. We remember the early novels not as wholes but by episodes. *Nicholas Nickleby* will probably bring to mind first of all the scenes at Dotheboys Hall and then the scenes in which the Crummles, Mr. Mantalini, and Mrs. Nickleby respectively appear ; their relations to the plot, and indeed the framework of the novel, we shall probably have difficulty in recalling at all. Similarly with *Martin Chuzzlewit*. Here Dickens was at the height of his genius ; he created characters in it which he was never to surpass. But the plot of the novel is impossibly melodramatic, so much so that the story itself hardly matters to us ; we remember this novel primarily for a handful of characters, of whom Mrs. Gamp and Pecksniff are pre-eminent, and for the satirical scenes of Martin in the United States.

Earlier, picaresque novels. In his earlier work, in fact, Dickens was writing picaresque novels, that is, novels in which the

hero usually sets out on a journey. What is important in such novels is what happens to the hero on the journey ; or rather simply what happens and whom he meets, because the nominal hero, Nicholas Nickleby or Martin Chuzzlewit, is himself quite unimportant. Dickens, in the form which these novels take, is still quite near to *Pickwick*, and with *Pickwick* they are the novels which for many years dominated the public appreciation of Dickens. An image of Dickens was set up which is still influential. One might call this image the "jolly Dickens", the Dickens of the stage-coach and merry Christmas who preaches universal benevolence ; Dickens, in other words, when he is in fairyland. When the adjective "Dickensian" is used, it generally implies this aspect of Dickens. It does indeed genuinely represent one side of him, but it is only one side, as *Oliver Twist* proved at the very beginning of his career. And it is not necessarily the most important side, though we cannot conceive of Dickens without it.

Money as a theme in the later novels. Dickens changed and developed. He became no longer content with improvisation, and he was no longer satisfied with attacking isolated evils such as the working of the Poor Law or the iniquities of some Yorkshire private schools. He began to attack what seemed to him the root of all contemporary evils, mamely money ; money is the great subject of the novels of the second part of his career.

The theme of money as the root of all evils. The first novel in which the theme of money as the root of all evils appears is *Dombey and Son*. It is a novel about the British merchant. The scene is overwhelmingly London ; there is no picaresque here. The stage-coach has gone ; the railway has taken its place, and the London of this novel is being torn up to make way for the railway. Indeed, the dominant image of this novel is the railway, and it is an image of change and destruction ; it is not an accident that the villain, Mr. Carker is killed by a train. The power of the railway and the change brought about by this innovation give the novel a unity that could never be got by the plot alone, even though a plot is here more carefully controlled than in earlier novels. Plot, character, and the entire action are here bound organically together by the all pervading symbol of the railway. With this book Dickens becomes a great poetic novelist ; symbol has become as important as character ; indeed, symbol gives added meaning to character.

An autobiographical novel. *Dombey and Son* was followed by *David Copperfield* which was Dickens's favourite among his works. *David Copperfield* is a magical novel. It has a mellowness even a serenity, found nowhere else in Dickens. It is not autobiography but it is autobiographical in inspiration. It is, in its first part, the most wonderful account of the secret life of childhood in English and probably in any language ; and it contains many of Dickens's finest characters, Micawber, Miss Trotwood, Murdstone, Heep ;

and in the Peggotys he produced some of the best portrayal of that good-hearted, honest simplicity of character that for him truly shone like good deeds in a naughty world. It is the most humane of his novels, the most balanced, the most moving. It sums up a whole experience of life.

No serenity in his novels. Mellowness and serenity, however, were not qualities usually attained by Dickens, and the novels that follow *David Copperfield* are anything but serene. In *Bleak House*, *Hard Times*, *Little Dorrit*, *Great Expectations*, and *Our Mutual Friend* the attack on his times is ceaseless. The attack is not an intellectual one ; it is emotional, because it had its origin in the very roots of Dickens's being, and it is expressed poetically in the vast symbols that sustain each of the novels in turn. Throughout *Little Dorrit* we feel the brooding presence of the Marshalsea ; society is seen as a prison. The fog over London with which *Bleak House* opens fills the novel ; to enter the Court of Chancery is to be permanently befogged so that one cannot distinguish reality from illusion. *Our Mutual Friend* is dominated by the great dust-heaps from which Mr. Boffin's unexpected wealth derives.

A thoroughgoing attack on society. After *David Copperfield* Dickens's greatest novel is perhaps *Our Mutual Friend*. It is certainly his most thoroughgoing attack on the society of his day. Dickens sums up the astonishing self-complacence of the Victorian Age in the character of Plr. Podsnap, with his "I don't want to know about it ; I don't choose to discuss it ; I don't admit it." In Mr. Podsnap Dickens expresses uncompromisingly his hatred and scorn of the materialism of his times and its deliberate blindness. Podsnap is a businessmen. His friends are the new-rich Veneerings, who are only too eager to take up the Boffins when the old dust-man inherits the dust-heaps from his miserly employer Harmon. These dust-heaps actually existed. They were in fact huge heaps of rubbish and refuse. They were enormously valuable, for their owners raked them over for the jewellery and coins sometimes found in them, while their other contents—bones, broken bottles, cooking utensils, skins and so on—could be sold to a variety of industries. They were, of course, the bleeding-places of disease ; but they also bred money for their owners ; and Dickens in his novel looks upon them as the great source of money. This desease-ridden dirt, Dickens seems to say, is what Mr. Podsnad and his kind are trafficking in ; it is where their power and luxury come from ; it is this which allows them to live in deliberate ignorance of the facts of society ; and it prosmote further corruption of the natural sympathy of man for man.

Later novels versus earlier ones. *Our Mutual Friend* is a very great novel ; but whether Dickens's best or second-best, it is still only one great novel among a dozen. During his life-time and for many years afterwards, the Dickens whom the critics most

enthusiastically praised was the Dickens of the first half of his career, the author of the novels up to and including *David Copperfield*, the sunnier Dickens who could change the world around him into a fairyland of humour. No one wishes to forego this Dickens; but in recent years the novels written after *David Copperfield* have been receiving more and more attention and ever greater admiration. The range of his genius was such that it is still scarcely possible to see his work as a whole. There was never a novelist like him before, and it is extremely improbable that there will be one like him in the future.

VI

New sources of humour in his novels. Perhaps Dickens's major contribution to literature, that which gives him his rank among the giants, was his discovery of new sources of humour. Like Smollett, the greatest literary influence on him, he saw the humour of funny faces. It is said that Dickens often made faces at himself in the mirror and then, returning to his desk, started writing. He was delighted too by the humour of odd tricks of speech, like the jerky machine-gunning staccato conversation of Mr. Jingle, and the ungrammatical circumlocutions* of the uneducated in sentences from which they can only extricate themselves by means of more and more relative clauses. He went far beyond Smollet in the supreme sophistication which can see childish fun in the contrariness of inanimate objects. The waistcoat button that would not button was something new in English literature. He also exploited to the full the absurdity of the apt or ludicrously unsuitable name, and he loved to mock the humour of the professional outlook—the overriding egotism which makes an undertaker say that a beautiful funeral is something to "reconcile us to the world we live in."

Method of dealing with human character. Dickens's approach to character was that of the actor, not that of the philosopher or the psychologist. He observed from the outside; he built up character boldly and swiftly, catching the salient features, and his cut-and-thrust method triumphed because it resulted in something unforgettably vivid.

Little concern for "form". Genius he had in plenty, but it was untutored, and the restless fertility in contriving situations and inventing characters was never pruned by concern for form. Dickens added little to the development of the novel; it remained in his hands what it had been in the eighteenth century, a picaresque tale with a moral bias or the happy blending of drama and narration. Perhaps the author was less intrusive than formerly and the marshalling of climaxes undertaken at more breathless speed, but Dickens disclosed no conscious artistic purpose—he was quite indifferent to the medium he used.

*_i.e._ round-about manner of speaking.

A true Victorian. Dickens is the Victorian age in fiction, or a large part of it. He shared its faults of taste, its love of melodrama, its exuberant vitality, its belief in the sharp division of humanity into sheep and goats. He shared, too, the innate optimism of the period. His novels, humour apart, are morality plays in which the good angels win the battle for the soul of man.

VII

Faults in taste and style. Dickens wrote rapidly, and could not therefore exercise individual care in building up his works. His faults in taste and in style are many ; his literary individuality lacks polish. He sacrifices balance for the sake of intense effects ; his expression obeys monotonous habits ; he repeats himself to excess. His pathos is cheap or exaggerated ; his imagination tends rather to distort than to emphasize the character of things ; his vision is apt to lose the very sense of repose. At the very core of his genius is a persistent spirit of romanticism which subordinates the actual truth of every feature to emotional or picturesque values. His realism is stirred by a feverish force of hallucination. And throughout the whole of his work the effusion and the expression of self disturb or contradict the relative objectivity without which there could be no novel of real life. At every turn in his stories we come upon the favourable or unfavourable opinions of the author—a kind of sentimental commentary on his own work ; and these instances of bias, intensified by polemical preferences and arguments, too often bore or annoy the reader. However, all these faults, which the contemporaries of Dickens found easy to tolerate, while the succeeding generation condemned them severely, are today seen in a gentler light as connected with the sovereign gifts of an inspired artist.

The lack of artistic restraint. Dickens's faults of taste are very glaring. He wrote for a living, and once established as the leading entertainer of his time, he worked strenuously to maintain his popularity. His theatricality and sensationalism are frequently overdone. He gives free rein to his facetiousness. He is shameless in iteration ; and while he seldom fails to give a new turn to the old effect, we cannot credit him with the virtue of artistic restraint. He is not afraid of the obvious. A certain cheapness that clings to his best writing grows rank when he begins to indulge in pathos and morality. He lets himself fall into the tone of his day and his class. The tragic seriousness of a Hamlet or an Othello is something quite out of his range. He does not even show the full integrity of the imagination in observing the limits and the inner congruity of his theme.

The unreality of Dickens's world. No writer has ever had such a marvellous faculty of depicting what may be called "town-scenery" as Dickens. He can give the interior of a house or a room, the "atmosphere" of furniture, the general air of a street, as

no one had given these things before him. Further, he can people these scenes with figures which at their best have a vivacity, an arresting power, again inferior to none. And he can adjust scenes and figures for several purposes, but above all for the purpose of humorous action tending slightly to the farcical, with a felicity in his earlier and better days almost unerring, and even in his later seldom far out. Yet it has been questioned whether the life with which his scenes and characters are provided is altogether human life—whether his world is not rather a huge phantasmagoria of his own creation.

The faults in characterization. His main faults can hardly be denied. His range of character, though extensive, was also peculiar and strictly limited. He certainly did not draw, with any success, persons beyond the lower and the lower middle classes ; and the defence sometimes offered, that he did not wish to do so, may be rejected, for he tried and failed to do it. His characters of the upper and upper middle classes have not merely the fantastic quality ; they are not creatures who, in another and slightly altered world, might be real, and are still delightful ; they are monsters not suited to any conceivable scheme. The relatives of the second Mrs. Dombey (except Cousin Feenix, who is at least a genial improbability), the society of the Dedlocks, the guests of the Dorrits in their prosperity, and some of those of the Veneerings, have hardly a touch of life. They are to the human species what the fancy birds and beasts of a taxidermist are to the actual fauna of this earth. Furthermore, Dickens had many irritating mannerisms, a lack of any real sympathy with great and high regions of thought, and an unfortunate tendency to talk about what he did not understand. But he remains the greatest fantastic novelist of England and, with Balzac, the greatest fantastic novelist of the world, and his three best books, which may be taken to be *Pickwick Papers*, *David Copperfield*, and *Great Expectations*, are the masterpieces of their special kind.

4

Character-Portrayal in the Novels of Charles Dickens

I

Dickens's wide perception of things and of character. Dickens is prodigious as a creator. The picture which he painted of the English social world is one of the richest in the whole range of literature. His perception of things and of characters is remarkable for its direct keenness and fresh vigour. While not unlimited in scope, this perception is very wide. Coloured as it is by the writer's personality, it possesses the quality of an incomparable liveliness. There is nothing scientific about it, nor does it seek to be so. It takes from reality only what interests it ; and as the needs which it obeys are those of emotion and humor, the real is organised into a show of varied interest, always intense in effect, and of a tone either dramatic or facetious. Into this world no one can penetrate unless he has bowed to the writer's will ; but such is the power of his charm that we forget to exercise our critical faculty. Few are the readers who can wholly resist the spell.

The limitations of his portrayal of characters. At the first glance our eye is caught by the swarming host of human figures who give to every part of Dickens's work the pulsation of life itself. Still, their quality is far form equal. The writer has not created them through one and the same intuition of their original beings ; he has not felt them all grow upon him with one and the same power and force. Their features may have been suggested from the outside by a caprice of the imagination, by a preconceived feeling, or by the demands of the plot ; they may represent supeficial or the deductive intentions ; instead of being nourished from the deeper personality of the novelist, they may be, as it were, engrafted upon more exterior elements—mere desires for antithesis or effect. Then it is that, being less directly connected with the very substance of their maker, they resemble more closely one or other of his features, and resemble life less closely. They bear the stamp of his caprice, of a bent in his mind, of some partiality in his outlook ; and being devoid of any lineaments proper to themselves which might have played the part

of an addition or a corrective, they are nothing but that impoverished expression of their creator's personality. There is in the work of Dickens a whole range of artificial creatures, arbitrarily drawn by his somewhat crude dramatic sense, by his hasty aversions, by his taste for drollery which often approaches caricature. And so it happens that his personages have no other interest but what they may owe to satire, melodrama, or farce.

The irresistible vitality of his characters. But into the satire, pathos, or farce, many of his heroes infuse the superior virtue of an irresistible vitality. These bear a no less recognisable imprint of their origin. A Pickwick, a Sam Weller, a Jingle, a Micawber, a Peggotty, a Dick Swiveller, a Marchioness, quite as much as a David Copperfield, are members of one family, whose common father is easily identified. They all have something of Dickens's own readily compassionate humanity, and some gleam of his humour. Nevertheless, they are themselves, and they develop according to their own principles. So extreme is their deversity that they exemplify in every respect the essential individuality of living beings. But they all have an undeniable existence ; they have, as it were, a witchcraft in them ; no one thinks of discussing them ; they come forth, and we accept them ; they possess the solidity, the volume of three-dimensional figures ; the personality which supports them has transferred itself entirely into them, and has shaped them according to the mysterious instinct of all its powers. This creative process, identical with that which we find in the masterpieces of the stage, is accomplished with admirable abundance and variety. Yet here again we find many grades. The best of the personages are not usually those whom Dickens has studied most deliberately and consciously. It is not often that his heroes, heroines, or traitors have quite as much flavour, as much vivaciousness or irresistible truth, as the less prominent characters which he has dashed off with a freer hand. In the episodical part of his work his spontaneous energy very often adds an unforgettable vigour to the literal accuracy of the outlines. And it is here, perhaps, that his masterly skill is seen at its best.

His liking for peculiarities and oddities of character. Dickens appealed to the very heart of England, and England recognised itself in his pages because he offered to it a picture of itself which it loved to see ; he showed it an England at its best. In a nation of very mixed tendencies like every other nation in this respect, Dickens singles out the features of genial humanity and organises them into a whole ; the author himself assumes, and often gives to his characters, an expression of sympathy ; the smile of humour, and the cheeriness of a kind heart. This composite portrait, in which not only Mr. Pickwick but many others have a share, has the value of a synthetic image ; the moral preferences of Dickens enter into every one of its lineaments. These preferences comprise, with a warm expansiveness of heart, a liking for the peculiarities of

character, and almost a taste for eccentric oddities ; a realism both psychological and descriptive, which springs from a lively curiosity and which is full of an instinctive trust in life. This accounts for the great and continuing popularity of the work of Dickens.

II

The individualizing strokes in his character-portrayal. Successful as Dickens is in his story telling, what remains with us when we have read his best novels are the characters. A mere glance at the list of persons who figure in any of his novels is enough to remind us of the author's amazing fertility in invention. Smollet had a genius for obtaining from actual life strange new types to people the world of the imagination, but in Dickens this faculty was multiplied manifold. It was formerly the fashion to dispose of Dickens's characters as eccentrics, and to describe his method with them as the isolation and exaggeration of a single trait ; but what makes them infinitely droll and human is the individualizing strokes, the shading, the complication of traits and circumstances. Micawber is vastly more than a shiftless businessman without business, always waiting for something to turn up and always ready to give his IOU for loans that are never repaid. In addition to all that, he is a man of native gentility and charm, cheerful like a bird, with a highly individual accent in conversation and special aptitude for rhetorical and inflated phraseology.

A combination of disparate traits. The root of the comedy in this characterisation is perhaps in all cases the combination in a single person of traits that ideally do not go together. The characters are almost invariably marked on the surface by some weakness, something ridiculous in manner—often the pretence of meanness or crustiness as with Betsy Trotwood. The fools and idiots, like Mr. Dick, are likely to show the most surprising wisdom at critical moments. There are many characters, like Mr. Wemmick, whose private lives are models of Christian virtue but who in professional life conscientiously observe the code of the skinflint.

Snobbishness and mock gentility in the characters. Snobbishness and mock gentility are regular ingredients in Dickens's characters. The shabbiest and most illiterate speaks in an idiom above his social position. And this is the unfailing spice of the comedy, as it is the main substance of the satire. Dickens himself was certainly not a snob, and he hated the cruelty and narrowness of heart, that so often go with every kind of snobbishness. But he realized that pretentiousness is a tribute paid by the low to the high. Man has not the moral strength or the command over circumstance to realize his ideal. But what he cannot bring out in action he can supply from his imagination or that bare minimum that is essential to keep a spark of human dignity alive. It is this feeling more than anything else which gives to Dickens's work the peculiar glow and

vibrancy that distinguish it from all others. This sentiment was of course supported by some fund of animal spirits that enabled him to write with so much verve and gusto, so much bounce and sparkle. He managed to retain throughout his life the eyes of a child which open wide at the surprises, oddities, and marvels of the human scene.

III

Caricatures. *Pickwick Papers* is a book, formless as to plot, but crowded with humorous figures. These figures are given with broadly exaggerated traits. They talk freely, not to say inexhaustibly and all differently. But the author's chief resource is his faculty for bringing his caricatures into contact with the actual world, in situations that expose their oddities in high relief. Mr. Tupman as a lover, Mr. Winkle as a duellist or a sportsman, Mr. Pickwick in a breach-of-promise suit with the Widow Bardell, the Pickwick Club contending with a recalcitrant horse, the Revd. Mr. Stiggins drunk at a temperance meeting—these incongruities are narrated in a style always copious, but rapid and piquant.

Distortions and exaggerations of feature or manner. In his later novels Dickens improved on his first attempts. He continued to be a caricaturist, to rely on distortions and exaggerations of feature or manner; but his range of effects became broader, and his figures more significant. Sairy Gamp, in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, haunted by the mythical Mr. Harris; Micawber in *David Copperfield*, "waiting for something to turn up", humble Uriah Heep, sanctimonious Pecksniff, cheerful Mark Tapley, all have distinct individuality, yet all illustrate so conveniently common attitudes and habits of mind that we use their names freely as categories.

Loathsome and terrifying characters. In *Pickwick Papers* Dickens is purely a humorist; in the novels which followed he enlarged enormously the range of his power over his readers. By the use of the method which he had employed in his humours, he created figures of a different sort, to excite not laughter but loathing and terror. In the portrayal of these types also he gained subtlety with practice. Fagin and Sykes in *Oliver Twist*, Quilp the dwarf in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, are examples of rather crude methods of exciting physical horror; monstrous as they are, they do not haunt the reader with the terrible suggestions of inhumanity that lurks behind the placid, smiling face of Madame Defarge in *A Tale of Two Cities* as she sits in front of the guillotine, knitting, and counting the heads as they fall. In these novels Dickens showed again his fertility in inventing situations, using his theatrical power as freely in melodrama as in farce. The behaviour of Fagin at his trial and in prison is the creation of an actor, careful to make every gesture, every expression tell on his audience.

Children as victims of society. A third type of character

which Dickens developed was that of the victim of society—usually a child. Oliver Twist, Little Nell, Florence Dombey, David Copperfield, stand out among such characters. These characters represent the complaint of the individual against the wrong done by society and its institutions. In nearly all his novels there is an attack upon some legal or social evil. Undoubtedly there was something theatrical in his adoption of social wrong as a theme for fiction, but there was also much that was sincere. Dickens had himself known the lot of the persecuted ; at the root of his zeal for social reforms was the memory of his own bitter childhood.

IV

The unlimited diversity of mankind. Dickens's concern was with *characters*, not with *character* : he aimed at portraying the infinite diversity of mankind, not at analyzing the individual ; his genius was for the extensive not the intensive vision. In *Pickwick Papers* he displays the fertility of his character-creation. There are nearly a hundred names in the list of dramatis personae prefixed to most editions of this novel ; it has been calculated that about three hundred and fifty persons come on the scene in some role or another. A very large proportion seem to have been drawn from people whom Dickens had personally known. Pickwick himself is a composite being, and idealized too ; his fellow-Pickwickians, Tupman, Snodgrass and Winkle, seem to have been evolved for the occasion from the inner consciousness of the writer. Dickens does not offer any glimpses of what goes on below the surface; but his unerring intuition is seen in the fact that every character behaves with self-evident consistency. They are all people with conspicuous peculiarities or obvious resemblances to familiar types, the peculiarities being strengthened to make the flavour unmistakable. In this novel, Pickwick with his grave outlook on life holds the miscellaneous book together : but the great character is Sam Weller, the realistic philosopher, brimming over with a vitality, a humour, and a poetry of his own.

Dickens's keen intuitions. *Pickwick Papers* is a novel which comprehends all the groups and classes and all the types which were to appear in Dickens's later fiction. Dickens had uncommon sensibility to common things. He represented the people : he liked what they liked, and more than anyone before or since understood the infinite variety of their likes and dislikes, a freedom and variety which they valued and of which almost unconsciously they were most proud. Like them, again, he was satisfied with his divinations and not given to reflection ; he merely had keener intuitions than anyone else, and was as incapable of reflecting as anybody. Even his satire is merely impulsive, though it did not stop easily when it had once begun ; hence his irrepressible laughter at the absurdities of snobs and big-wigs, of officialdom and the law, is all the more deadly because of the apparent effort to keep it under control and maintain the neutral tone of a friendly humorist.

Characters drawn from actual observation and experience. Even apart from *Pickwick Papers*, a large number of Dickens's characters originated from amongst his regular or his chance acquaintances. It was Dickens's habit to make mental notes of the peculiarities of people, and consciously or unconsciously to develop a handful of traits into a character. There is little doubt therefore that the large majority of his characters, and those among the richest in the comedy of human nature had actual originals. The individual observed may have been only the germ, the datum-point for a flight of imaginative extravagance. But Dickens's comic genius required a fulcrum, a bit of solidity, something concrete which he could keep a hold upon. Readers in the time of Dickens often talked of having met a character out of Dickens's fiction.

A classification of Dickens's characters. There seem to be at least three fairly distinguishable grades into which Dickens's characters may be classified. The highest are those living creations which may perchance have had their germs in oddities whom he had actually known, but were developed and transfigured into something richer and more strange. In some, a predominant trait or mannerism is carried to the very limits of the grotesque; others are more complex, more exuberant. The range from the richest and boldest, the Pickwicks and Wellers, the Gamps and Pecknsniffs, Dick Swiveller and Quilp, Mr. Micawber and Betsey Trotwood, Mr. Mantalini and Joe Gargery, to the Mark Tapleys, Chuffeys, Montague Tiggs, Wemmicks, Crummleses, Kenwigses, and countless others who are their equals at least in one thing, in being unlike every other individual in the motley crowd. An odd one here and there may perhaps not ring true; Chevy Slyme, for instance, in *Martin Chuzzlewit* and Rose Dartle in *David Copperfield*. Perhaps in some cases Dickens had not quite understood them rightly, or he may have tried at an amalgam which fused badly, or again, he may have done violence to a character out of sheer neglect of forgetfulness of his original idea. He was always changing his mind, tampering with his plots, and starting in new directions that put a strain on characterization which was sound to begin with. Tom Pinch in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, however, is overdone from sentimental and moralistic motives rather than to satisfy the requirements of the plot.

The caricatures. The caricatures form a distinct and inferior class, magnificent as in effect most of them are. They were drawn from originals who inspired, not affection, but scorn and dislike, or whom he knew superficially and did not want to know better. Such were these preposterous Americans and burlesque aldermen in "The Chimes". Such were a good many of his egregious big-wigs. As to Boythorn and Skimpole in *Bleak House*, they are not caricatures in the proper sense of the word, but tolerably faithful portraits of his friends, Landor and Leigh Hunt, utilised by Dickens to save himself the trouble of providing handiwork of his own.

Skimpole was such an abstract of the comic side of Leigh Hunt that it approximated to caricature, and was received as such. But in *Martin Chuzzlewit* as in most of Dickens's novels, melodrama works the plot, and the persons directly employed on the job are the usual lay figures of melodramatic fiction, no more characteristic of Dickens than of anyone else in the trade. In his more didactic stories some conventional good people or bad make their appearance. They are not characters, they have no personality ; anything or anybody will serve the purpose to point a moral, however little they may adorn the tale. While it is true that Dickens introduced into the world of fiction a greater and more diversified host than any other novelist, he also produced and employed on what may be called routine duties a large number of beings who have no being and who are mere lifeless bits of the mechanism. And yet these non-entities probably cost him more pains than living characters, because he had to contrive them out of his own head to carry out their appointed roles. *Martin Chuzzlewit* is a study of ruthless and sordid selfishness ; and in the grand impersonation of that vice, Dickens builds up an evil, terror inspiring figure. But Jonas Chuzzlewit remains only a figure, an embodiment of evil, not a conscious human spirit subject to all the normal weaknesses of the flesh. As for young Martin, he is a duplicate of any respectable young fellow doing duty as hero in a novel. The best that can be said of such characters is that they behave consistently and at times impressively, in the parts assigned to them.

The characters betwixt and between. Some of the characters of Dickens, however, are not so easily clasified. There are some who come betwixt and between. The line is often vague between caricature and the far more than caricature ; even the performers in the melodrama are by no means barren of attributes much higher than melodrama : for instance, Bill Sikes and Fagin in *Oliver Twist*, or the gruesome comedy in *The Old Curiosity Shop* and the baffled villainies of the monstrous Quilp and his odd pair of confederates. In a sense, all of them are drawn from life. But observation was only the starting-point ; perhaps a glance was enough : the rest is Dickens and his comic vision rejoicing in the wildest absurdities of which human nature can be imagined capable.

A master of dialogue. Dickens's method, either in caricature, or in free imaginative portrayal, after he had sketched the persons in a few rapid strokes, was to let them depict themselves by letting them speak. Whatever may be said, rightly or wrongly, against his style, Dickens shows himself at least in his dialogue a great artist in words.

Dickens's inabilty to go very far below the surface. Chief among Dickens's limitations was his inability to see far below the outward and visible idiosyncrasies of mankind. In this respect

Dickens resembles Sir Walter Scott. James Oliphant* put the matter rather too aggresively when he said in his book, *Victorian Novelists* : "The prime defect of Dickens was the lack of insight into character." Carlyle was less severe and a good deal more accurate in his famous complaint that, instead of building up his characters, as Shakespeare did, from the heart outwards, "Scott fashions them from the skin inwards, never getting near the heart of them." And Carlyle would have said the same of Dickens. There will always be these differences between even the greater character-creators. There are those who contemplate the varied surface and seize the features which differentiate man and man, and there are those who explore human nature itself, laying bare the very springs of character and action. Perhaps Shakespeare alone united the all-seeing eye and the penetrating vision which at the same time discerns the inmost life, if others have had some smaller share of this universalizing power. But it must be admitted that Scott and Dickens, although they do not reveal the inner mechanism, do not often go wrong in reading the dial-face at which these workings are indicated. There may be no real profundity in the portrayals of Sam Weller and Mrs. Gamp; but Dickens must have thoroughly understood the subtle and tortuous mental processes going on in each case, or the immortal pair would never have risen to the full height of so many different emergencies with such uniform credit. Neither Scott nor Dickens is ever at fault when they take long enough to feel the pulse of the machine, to count minutes and seconds. If they go amiss, it is through contenting themselves with a hasty glance ; or in Dickens's case, it is when he sets the clock beforehand and forces the machinery to work in accordance with a predetermined plan. How much Dickens did ignore is less perceptible because of the vividness with which he gives us what he does not ignore; he seizes the salient and striking features with such gusto and vigour that the reader may fail to notice that the inner reality has been missed. It is just here that his grip on personality fails. The distinctions of character which he observes are purely external. The deeper differences between one consciousness and another consciousness are a sealed book to Dickens. He knows that there is the deeper difference and the deeper resemblance ; but he cannot put his finger on the place and show what it really amounts to. To him, humanity consisted of an infinite number of individuals, all different, and it was this multifariousness that occupied his whole attention. His characters do not react upon one another. In fact they do not act at all ; they only behave, and show off their unlikeness one to the other.

Taine's criticism of Dickens's characters. In his history of English literature, the French writer M. Taine, complains of the static and undramatic nature of Dickens's characters. Pecksniff, according to Taine, is a mask, not a man, though the mask is so

*The author of *Victorian Novelists*.

grotesque that it would do a public service by diminishing the number of hypocrites. Dickens, says Taine, began with a book of essays, and his novels are only essays stitched together into a series. His characters do not grow and change, as they would if presented as living wholes. They have no history. But Taine fails to mention *Great Expectations*, the only possible exception to his sweeping generalization. Pip has a history, although he hardly makes history, leaving the rest to the characters exactly as he found them, apart from events which he does not direct. But even Pip is no exception to the rule that the characters of Dickens behave and do not act. Dickens pretended to make them act, to form purposes and carry them out, for example in the case of Uriah Heep and Mr. Micawber. But who believes in Uriah's deep-laid scheme for ruining Mr. Wickfield and getting the business into his own hands, or in the counter-plotting of Mr. Micawber which defeats his villainy ? It is the same with Jonas Chuzzlewit, with Mr. Carker, and anyone else represented as carrying out some nefarious or benevolent enterprise or intrigue : they prove, on the slightest scrutiny, to be sheer impostors, mere puppets, shifted about to suit the exigencies of the plot. They and the rest of the company had to be shown performing their antics ; and this was all that the elaborate plots were meant for, though Dickens would never have admitted it even to himself. It is the reason for his big scenes, which brought together a picturesque diversity of characters, their oddities in the most piquant contract, but with a singular absence of dramatic interaction. The reverse was the case with Thackeray : Thackeray was so far from liking this kind of plot-business that he went to the other extreme and abandoned plot altogether. That was one reason why Thackeray was so long making his due impression on the public, and why he probably will never be as popular as Dickens.

Dickens's picture of life often heightened and exaggerated. It is pertinent to ask whether Dickens was a realist at all. On the one hand, he achieved the most vivid picture ever painted of the life that he knew, and in parts of his novels and in the whole of some of them the picture is faithful and unexaggerated. *Pickwick Papers*, *David Copperfield*, and *Great Expectations* are the truest version available of life in general in his early and middle days ; and *Dombey and Son* is far from being a failure in the attempt to depict the well to-do mercantile and professional classes. But at his most characteristic, the picture is not merely heightened and exaggerated ; it is fantastic. And yet there is no reason to quarrel with those who give Dickens a place among realists, and point to his richness of descriptive detail as one aspect of his realism. Everything he wrote was, at all events, founded in the world of actuality. But the circumstance that realistic fiction has generally taken low life as its special object, gives a false colour to the view that Dickens must straightaway be put among the realists. As a whole, his picture is not like the life that people are familiar with. The world he sets before his readers is a world of his own imagination.

Dickens's brand of realism in the portrayal of characters. The term, realism, is used in two very different senses. The more common sense is depicting things as they are or as they appear. The other sense is the art of making anything that may be imagined look real ; it may even make the impossible seem probable. Dickens has most of this second kind of realism. The typical character in the novels of Dickens is represented by Sam Weller, Mr. Mantalini, Pecksniff, Micawber, Quilp, Dick Swiveller, or Joe Gargery ; some of these may have been drawn from actual life without much alteration, but none of them resembles the people that might be met with any day, such as is the case with the characters in the novels of Thackeray. Several of Dickens's novels are thickly · peopled with oddities and eccentrics, grotesque or absurd beings, freaks of nature and freaks of art, but all have a life of their own, though they are not like anything in ordinary experience. Dickens may have seen their originals ; he himself may even have seen them exactly as he has drawn them for the world to him was alive with such captivating absurdities. Nevertheless, they are new creations. Howver they may have originated, these imaginative figures are substaetiaoted by their wn dramatic integrity and by the potent engine of Dickens's realistic art. Ultimately, all partake of a certain reality ; all become more than probable. Dickens's fertility in creations which possess the durable substance entitles him to be compared with Shakespeare. Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch wrote this about Dickens : " If it come to the mere wonder-work of genius—the creation of men and women, on a page of paper, who are actually more real to us than our daily acquaintances, companionable in a crowd as even our best selected friends, as individual as the most eccentric we know, yet as universal as humanity itself, I do not see what English writer we can choose to put second to Shakespeare save Charles Dickens." There is nothing to quarrel with in this tribute except the phrase "as universal as humanity itself," because the view of Dickens's character-portrayal taken above is that his creations are mostly Dickensian and not at all universal.

5

Charles Dickens, The Great Humorist

The pure humorist in "Pickwick Papers". With the publication of Dickens's very first novel *Pickwick Papers*, Dickens's gift of humour became apparent. Here we find Dickens the pure humorist, rejoicing in his ability to dash off character after character, rejoicing too in the language he puts in their mouths, a language so fertile and exuberant in comic invention as to have a lyrical quality almost of poetry. Mr. Pickwick undergoes the rigours of trial for breach of promise ; he is put in prison ; he is fleeced by rogues ; humbugs, charlatans, snobs run riot through the book. Yet the world of this book is an innocent world ; this is the world of fairy-tale, with the bad fairies not monstrous but absurd. In this book the crudities and miseries of the real world are sterilized by humour.

Two kinds of comic characters. It is possible to divide Dickens's comic characters into two groups. When he accepts them without the intervention of any moral standards and rejoices in them for their own sake, the result is pure humour. Such are Pickwick, Sam Weller and Tony Weller, Mr. Micawber, Boffin, and, above all, Mrs. Gamp. When sympathy is withheld or when Dickens feels a strong moral disgust or contempt, the result is a character not so much of humour as of savage comedy with no good nature in it at all. Characters of this second kind are most evident when Dickens is attacking social injustice or flaws in the social code. Bumble, Heep, and Gradgrind are typical figures of savage comedy ; ridicule and contempt are poured upon them, but they remain monstrous and they terrify. Among figures of the first category, Mrs. Gamp may be regarded as the shining example of "the poetry of the comic" ; only a great poet could have invented her ; she belongs to the same order of creation as Falstaff.

Some examples of humour from Dickens's novels. The humour, the pathos, the power of weird description, the power of tragic representation in Dickens seem but the efforts of one faculty

of imagination. His super-abundant humour depends for its full appreciation on a knowledge of the characters who are its source and incidents which give rise to it. But this humour also has something odd, droll, unexpected, and incalculable in itself, which always marks it as the product of one peculiar and creative mind. When Mrs. Crupp, David Copperfield's laundress, is asked by that young gentleman how she knows that love is the cause of his restlessness and bad spirits, she, slightly drunk with David's brandy, solemnly replies, "Mr. Copperfield, I'm a mother myself". Venus, the artist in bones and amateur in skeletons, who lends such ghastly drollery to so many scenes in *Our Mutual Friend*, says to the impertinent boy who chaffs him : "Don't sauce *me* in the vicious pride of your youth; don't hit *me*, because you see I'm down. You've no idea how small you'd come out, if I had the *articulating* of you." When Jerry Cruncher, suspected by Mr. Lorry of having passed his nights in digging up bodies for the doctors, is asked by his employer what he has been besides a messenger, he conceives the luminous idea of replying, "Agricultural character". Mr. Swiveller, informed by the Marchioness that Miss Brass calls him a funny fellow, does not consider the description derogatory to his dignity because, he says "Old King Cole was himself a merry old soul, if we may put any faith in the pages of history." Mr. Vincent Crummles, wishing to do justice to the dramatic powers of Miss Henrietta Petowker, closes his eulogy with the climax, "She's the only sylph I ever saw who could stand upon one leg and play the tambourine on her knee, *like* a sylph." Mr. Wemmick, when he invites Pip to dine with him, remarks : "You don't object to an Aged Parent, I hope. Because I have got an Aged Parent at my place." Mr. Wegg charges Mr. Boffin more for reading poetry to him than he reads prose, for "when a person comes to grind off poetry, night after night, it is but right he should expect to be paid for its weakening effect on his mind." The young man of the name of Guppy, in his memorable proposal of marriage to Esther Summerson, mentions as one of his qualifications that his mother "is eminently calculated to be a mother-in-law." Mr. Dennis, the hangman, when desirous of propitiating the sentimental and scraggy Miss Miggs, addresses her by the endearing appellation of "My sugar stick." The Augustus of Miss Pecksniff runs off on the morning of his intended marriage with that meek maiden, and, as soon as he is safe on board the ship, writes to her : "Ere this reaches you, the undersigned will be—if not a corpse—on the way to Van Diemen's Land. Send not in pursuit. I never will be taken alive." And the immense humour of bringing a man of Mr. Boffin's mind and experience into contact with such a book as Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* could only have occurred to Dickens. The blank wonder of such a guileless soul in listening to the recital of the crimes of the Roman emperors is delicious. "Wegg takes it easy," he says contemplatively, "but, upon my soul, to an old bird take myself, these are scarers."

With full confidence can we endorse the following opinion ; "While we live, and while our children live, Sam Weller and Dick Swiveller, Mr. Pecksniff and Mr. Gamp, the Micawbers and the Squeerses, can never die. They are more real than we are ourselves, and will outlive and outlast us as they have outlived their creator. This is the one proof of genius which no critic, not the most carping or dissatisfied, can gainsay."

Delightful absurdities. One may be sure, says a critic, that Dickens will make future generations laugh as much as he made his own contemporaries laugh. His humour is so rich, so thorough, so varied, and so original that it must always appeal to the liking for oddities and eccentricities inherent in human nature. There is humour which does not exactly amuse, and there is humour which simply amuses and is delightful. Dickens had extraordinary humour of the second kind. He was infinitely droll and various in his mirthful moods, and the animal spirits abound in all his writings. The delightful absurdities of whom the chief are Dick Swiveller and Mark Tapley, Miggs and Mrs. Gamp will be delightful to reading humanity for a long time to come.

Immortal comic figures. The quality of humour founded in the roots of common humanity can never grow stale : nor can it die. It seems impossible to imagine a day when the world will refuse to laugh with Dickens. The Wellers and the Pecksniffs, the Swivellers and the Micawbers must surely abide for ever, unchanging and immortal—immortals of lesser note, but still of the same lineage with Falstaff.

John Ruskin's view. This is how John Ruskin commented on this aspect of the genius of Dickens in a letter to his father written in 1863 : "I quite agree in your estimate of Dickens. I know no writer so voluminous and unceasingly entertaining, or with such a store of laughter—legitimate, open-hearted, good-natured laughter ; not at things merely accidentally ridiculous or at mere indecencies, but at things inherently grotesque and purely humorous."

The most delightful manifestation of the idealism of Dickens, says a literary historian*, is his humour. None of the novels after *Pickwick Papers* was conceived so completely in the spirit of farce as was that ; and Sam Weller was never surpassed. On the whole, the humour of Dickens broadened and deepened in the immediately succeeding novels, especially in certain sections of *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Martin Chuzzlewit*, where humour was united with pathos in a sort of tragi-comedy. Mr. Richard Swiveller who, after being "staggered" for years, fell in with the small servant, dubbed her the Marchioness and taught her to play cribbage and drink hot purl, is the Don Quixote of blackguards. The disreputable workhouse nurse, Mrs. Gamp, moving about the stage haunted by the imagin-

* W.L. Cross in *The English Novel*.

ary Mrs. Harris, is Dickens's supreme achievement in humour. In *David Copperfield*, where in the Peggotty and Barkis episodes farce is held in some restraint, Dickens wrote pure comedy.

[**Note :** Sam Weller, probably Dickens's greatest comic character, appears in *Pickwick Papers*. Mrs. Sarah Gamp, who does not lag far behind Sam Weller, appears in *Martin Chuzzlewit* ; and so do Pecksniff and Mark Tapley. Squeers and Crummles appear in *Nicholas Nickleby*, Mr. and Mrs. Micawber and Peggotty, belong to the world of *David Copperfield*, as does Barkis. Guppy (and Esther Summerson) are characters in *Bleak House*. Mr. and Mrs. Boffin appear in *Our Mutual Friend*. Dick Swiveller belongs to *The Old Curiosity Shop*. Jerry Cruncher and Mr. Lorry are to be met with in *A Tale of Two Cities*.]

6

Charles Dickens, A Master of Pathos

Abundance of touching scenes in his novels. If Dickens is one of the greatest humorists in English literature, he is also one of the masters of the sentiment of pity. There is an abundance of scenes in his novels which move the reader to deep pity, and many scenes which even draw tears from his eyes. Pathos is indeed, one of the predominant effects of his fiction. From first to last Dickens tried about as much to make his readers cry as to make them laugh. It has rightly been pointed out that in the pathetic scenes Dickens greatly excels, and that two or three of his scenes, and numerous incidental touches, have never been surpassed, if the heart-felt tears of tens of thousands of his readers are any test.

Varieties of pathos in his novels. A.W. Ward observes : "His pathos is not less true than various, for the gradations are marked between the stern tragic pathos of *Hard Times*, the melting pathos of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, *Dombey and Son*, and *David Copperfield*, and the pathos of helplessness which appeals to us in Smike and Jo*". Another critic refers to many examples of that searching pathos of Dickens which irresistibly affects the great body of his readers, and even forces unwilling tears from hostile critics.

The scene of Little Nell's death in "The Old Curiosity Shop". A reviewer of Dickens's own time expressed the following view : "Little Nell is the favourite child of the author's genius. On her he seems to have lavished the rich powers of his mind, and the deepest affections of his heart. Her course, through the trying and agitating scenes of her short and spotless life, he saw from the beginning with certain eye, and traced with unerring hand. He seems to have watched her with real, heart-felt solicitude ; he certainly gave to her little adventures, and her mighty sorrows, and

*Smike and Jo are characters in *Nicholas Nickleby* and *Bleak House* respectively.

her heroic endurance a living reality, which month after month* deepened the sympathies, and held at their highest tension the feelings, of the whole reading world. Her death is perhaps the most pathetic scene in the literature of the age. Nothing has so profoundly stirred the world's great heart for many years."

The scene of the death of little Paul in "Dombey and Son." Lord Jeffrey, in a letter to Dickens, thus expressed his feelings after reading some of the chapters of *Dombey and Son* : "Oh, my dear Dickens ! What a Number** 5 (Chapters 14-16) you have now given us ! I have so cried and sobbed over it last night, and again this morning; and felt my heart purified by these tears, and blessed and loved you for making me shed them. Since that divine Nelly was found dead on her humble couch, beneath the snow and the ivy, there has been nothing like the actual dying of that sweet Paul***, in the summer sunshine of that lofty room." Later, referring to Chapters 29-31, Lord Jeffrey wrote to the author : "I cannot tell you how much I have been charmed with your last Number, and what gentle sobs and delightful tears it has cost me. It is the most finished, perhaps, in diction ; and in the delicacy of its pathos, of any you have ever given us ; while it rises to higher of its deeper passions ; not resting, like most of the former, in sweet thoughtfulness, and thrilling and attractive tenderness, but boldly wielding all the lofty and terrible elements of tragedy, and bringing before us the appalling struggles of a proud, scornful, and repentant spirit."

Dickens's capacity to draw tears. Hippolyte Taine, a leading French critic of literature and art in the nineteenth century, expressed the following view : "Yet there is no writer who knows better how to touch and melt; he makes us weep, absolutely shed tears. Before reading him we did not know there was so much pity in the heart. The grief of a child, who wishes to be loved by his father, and whom his father does not love ; the despairing love and slow death of a poor half-imbecile young man ; all these pictures of secret grief leave an ineffaceable impression."

Dickens's familiarity with human suffering. Walter Bagehot thus commented on this aspect of Dickens's genius : "He has naturally great power of pathos : his imagination is familiar with common sorts of human suffering : and his marvellous conversancy with the details of existence enables him to describe sick-beds and death-beds with an excellence very rarely seen in literature. A nature far more sympathetic than that of most authors has familiarised him

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*"Month after month" refers to the monthly instalments in which the novel appeared.

**that is, the fifth monthly instalment. (The novels of Dickens originally appeared in a serial form).

***The death of Paul is a touching scene in *Dombey and Son*.

with such subjects. In general, a certain apathy is characteristic of book-writers, and dulls the efficacy of their pathos. Mr. Dickens is quite exempt from this defect ; but, on the other hand, is exceedingly prone to a very ostentatious exhibition of the opposite excellence. He dwells on dismal scenes with a kind of fawning fondness ; and he seems unwilling to leave them, long after his readers have had more than enough of them."

Adverse opinions of Dickens's pathos : tiresome sentimental scenes. As the last sentence in the preceding paragraph shows, the pathos of Dickens is not always favouraby commented upon. Some critics find an excess of pathos in the work of Dickens ; others find it artificially produced ; such critics react against it strongly. Far from responding to the pathetic effects created by Dickens, these critics feel repelled by what they call excessive sentimentality and unmanly tears. A reviewer of Dickens's own time, for instance, thus expressed his adverse view : "Mr. Dickens's pathos we can only regard as a complete and absolute failure. It is unnatural and unlovely. He attempts to make a stilted phraseology, and weak and sickly sentimentality, do duty for genuine emotion. The result is that when he would move us most deeply he is apt to become rather a bore. Hard-hearted as it may sound, we must confess to having found little Paul Dombey and Little Nell and Tiny Tim exceedingly tiresome, and to have been glad to be rid of them on any terms. The subject is too insignificant for the treatment it receives. Even as sentimentalism the art is a failure from being so much overdone.........The pathos is 'stagey' ; it lacks simplicity, grace, dignity."

The overstrained pathos of melodrama. Another reviewer wrote thus : "We do not believe that Dickens's pathos is by any means his strong side. He spoils his best touches by his heavy hand in harping on them. Even in the death of little Paul, a great deal too much is made of a very natural death in itself—the child's languid interest in the return of the golden ripple to the wall at sunset, and his fancy that he was floating with the river to the sea. Dickens is so obviously delighted with himself for this picturesque piece of sentiment, that he quite fondles his own conception......We more than doubt, then, whether Dickens can be called a great master of pathos at all. There is no true lyrical, no poetic touch, about his pathos ; it is, in the main, the overstrained pathos of melodrama."

Dickens's pathos defended. As against such adverse comments, the following view is noteworthy : "That man must, indeed, have a mind either thoroughly bedimmed with conceit, or entirely degraded with more enormous vices, who can see nothing tender and touching in the narrative of the death of Paul Dombey or Little Nell, and who rises unaffected from their perusal."

Dickens's pathos versus his humour. The following opinion seeks to compare the quality of Dickens's pathos with the quality of his humour : "Of his pathos we cannot candidly speak in such glowing terms as of his humour—not, however, because his pathos was not good, but because his humour was so matchless. He was humoristic by nature, and because he could not help himself. He was pathetic by art, and because pathos is indispensable to the writer of fiction." This means that humour came naturally and spontaneously to Dickens's pen, while to create pathos Dickens had to exert himself.

7

Charles Dickens—A Novelist with a Purpose

Or

Charles Dickens and the Humanitarian Novel

A great social reformer. The novels of Dickens belong entirely to the humanitarian movement of the Victorian Age, of which they are indeed, in the sphere of fiction, by far the most important product and expression. He was from first to last a novelist with a purpose. In nearly all his books he set out to attack some specific abuse or abuses in the existing system of things, and throughout he adopted the role of a champion of the weak, the outcast, and the oppressed. Humanitarianism was indeed the keynote of his work, and, as his enormous popularity carried his influence far and wide, he may justly be regarded as one of the greatest social reformers of his age.

The child as the victim of society. One kind of character developed by Dickens was that of the victim of society—usually a child. The possibilities of childhood for romance or pathos had been suggested by Shakespeare, by Fielding, and by Blake ; but none of these had brought children into the very centre of the action or had made them highly individual. In his second novel Dickens centred his story in a child, Oliver Twist, and from that tim e onwards children were expected and necessary characters in his novels. Little Nell, Florence Dombey, David Copperfield, stand out in divine innocence and goodness, in contrast to the evil creatures whose persecution they suffered for a time. And further they represent in a most effective manner the complaint of the individual against society. For with Dickens the private cruelty which his evil-minded characters inflict is almost always connected with social wrong.

A writer of humanitarian novels. The name of Charles Dickens is pre-eminently associated with the humanitarian novel. After the publication of *Nicholas Nickleby* and *The Old Curiosity*

Shop, Dickens became a sort of professor* of humanitarianism, and he held this position for nearly thirty years. He turned the light of his knowledge upon a great variety of English scene and character, but especially upon work-houses, debtors' prisons, pawnbrokers' shops, hovels of the poor, law offices, dark streets and dark alleys, the London haunts and hiding places of vice, crime, and pain. His theme was always the downtrodden and the oppressed ; he was their advocate ; for them each of his novels after *Pickwick Papers* is a lawyer's brief. He did not believe it possible for the lower and the criminal classes to raise themselves by elective franchise to a higher moral and intellectual plane. To him parliament was the dreariest place in the world ; so he sought to arouse the conscience of the British public. He accordingly attended meetings of philanthropic societies, visited jails and prisons, holding long conversations with the keepers and went on addressing the ever-increasing audience of his novels. Through him spoke the heart and conscience of Britain which had found no responsive voice in Sir Walter Scott.

His aim, to rouse the social conscience. *Pickwick Papers* had been an attempt at pure humour ; it was a series of entertaining episodes loosely strung together. In the novels that followed *Pickwick Papers*, Dickens took on the role of the crusader. His aim was to wring the conscience of society by playing upon its feelings and presenting scenes of wretchedness and misery that could be shown as the result of social indifference and callousness.

Attack on organized charity. As a crusader for the oppressed sections of English society, Dickens first attacked the stony-heartedness of organized charity. In *Oliver Twist* (1838), he showed that the Poor Law Reform Act had only strengthened institutionalism by giving authority to unkindness. In Mr. Bumble all selfish dispensers of public charity stand condemned, and in *Oliver Twist* their helpless victims find an everlasting symbol. For Oliver to have become a national byword as the small boy who dared to ask for a second helping is a measure of the impact of his story on the well-fed and complacent reading public.

Attack on private schools. *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839) exposed what was going on behind the doors of private schools. This novel revealed to the public the vulgar and brutal ignorance of a certain class of teachers in private academies. The establishment which represents such private schools in this novel is called Dotheboys' Hall. After reading this book, parents began to feel ashamed of the schools where their children were being educated ; scores of young scholars were taken away ; many schoolmasters had to close down their teaching establishments. It is said that, as a result of the influence this book exerted on the public, schoolboys' backs were

*that is, propagandist or champion of humanitarian causes.

no longer caned, schoolboys' meat became less tough and more plentiful, and their milk was no longer so diluted with water.

A sense of dis-illusionment with American society. A visit to America in 1842 resulted in a bitter disappointment for Dickens. He had expected too much. There in a free republican country he believed he would meet with more natural goodness, equality, and justice than he had found at home. Instead he found disgusting manners, a crudity that repelled him, and a venality unrivalled even in Europe. *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1844) records this disillusionment. American scenes in it gave offence, but the book is memorable for its characters. Sarah Gamp, Tom Finch, Mark Tapley, and that prince of hypocrites, Pecksniff, make the novel a favourite with English readers.

Attack on law's delays, legal costs, etc. *Bleak House* (1853) is a tragedy which was suggested by the legal proceedings arising from the estate of one William Jennings who had died in 1798, leaving property at Birmingham worth many millions. The case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce is a commentary, at once tragic and satirical, on the abuses of the old courts of Chancery, the delays and costs of which brought misery and ruin to the litigants. The novel tells the sombre story of hearts worn to despair and minds driven to madness by the inscrutable injustice and the infinite delays of the law. From the physical fog that blots out the city of London, Dickens here passed to the dreadful night of spiritual darkness that is at its thickest and most terrible in the workings of a system of law that had lost touch with human needs. In addition to this theme, there is the shocking case of young Joe, symbolic of utter destitution leading to death by starvation.

Attack on industrial evils. In *Hard Times* (1854), Dickens attacks the industrial evils of his day. Coketown represents all industrial towns, while the Gradgrinds and the Bounderbys serve as the inhuman representatives of the system of enlightened self-interest that had only theory to recommend it.

Attack on the Civil Service. The target *Little Dorrit* (1857) is the unreformed Civil Service with its nepotism and its injustice. Here the dice are loaded against the "circumlocution* offices" and the human Barnacles who make the system work but whose selfishness and indifference destroy the soul in the society they serve.

Entitled to the gratitude of posterity. Apart from his supreme value as an entertainer in fiction, Dickens earned the grati-

*A circumlocution office means a dilatory office or an office where cases are unduly delayed. In England in those days government departments were a network of jobbery and nepotism, and delays were common. India can even today boast of such offices, offices which promise only harassment and take away the peace of mind of those who have to deal with them.

tude of posterity for awakening the social conscience. In an age marred by callousness and complacency Dickens never lost faith in fundamental human goodness. Although he could see with clear eyes the stronger impersonal evil created by society, he continued to believe in the kindly fatherhood of God and in the triumphant power of love. Organisation, whether political or charitable or religious, he rejected ; the law killed ; and systems, no matter how efficient, were no substitute for the warm human relationships that were based on man's responsibility for his fellows. In his ideal of spontaneous benevolence flowing from some inexhaustible fountain of human goodness Dickens saw the great solvent of the grief and misery that poisoned life around him.

8

"Hard Times" : An Introduction

A great but not a popular novel. *Hard Times* appeared in 1854 in weakly instalments in a periodical called "Household Words" of which Dickens himself was the editor. Soon after its first appearance, Dickens's great contemporary, John Ruskin, expressed the view that in several respects it was Dickens's greatest work and that it should especially be studied with close and earnest care by persons interested in social questions. Many years later, G B. Shaw also gave high praise to this novel. Still later, F.R. Leavis described it as a work of genius. Nevertheless, it has never been one of Dickens's most popular novels. One reason for its lack of popularity probably is that it has a slender plot, and that there is in it a dearth of the kind of incidents and episodes which appeal to the popular mind. Secondly, it is an "intellectual" novel, a novel which would appeal only to thinking readers and not those who merely expect entertainment.

The meaning of the title. *Hard Times* is a novel with a distinct social purpose. The expression "hard times" generally means a period of slump or depression when food is scanty, when wages are low, and when unemployment is widespread. However, Dickens has not used this phrase in that sense. What Dickens means by this phrase is a general state of affairs in which the lives of people are inhibited or restricted and in which people are prevented from giving a free and spontaneous outlet to their natural feelings and sentiments. The phrase implies a kind of bondage to routine and calculation which result from mechanisation and industrialism.

Targets of attack in this novel. *Hard Times* is a novel in which Dickens fiercely attacks what he regarded as some of the evils afflicting Victorian society. He attacks an educational theory which was based upon "facts" and "statistics" ; he attacks the motive of self-interest promoted by industrialism and utilitarianism ; he attacks the unsatisfactory relationship between labour and capital ; he attacks the callousness of factory-owners and the pig-headedness and aggressiveness of trade unionism ; he attacks the feverish but

futile routine followed by members of Parliament and the sterility of Parliament itself.

Its tightly organised structure. As already indicated, *Hard Times* is somewhat deficient in plot-interest. But the story of this novel can by no means be described as tedious or dull. The various threads of the plot are successfully interwoven, and the various strands properly integrated. The novel tells the story of Gradgrind and his two children, Louisa and Tom ; it tells the story of Bounderby, his wife, and his housekeeper ; it tells the story of Stephen and Rachel ; it tells the story of Louisa, Harthouse, and Mrs. Sparsit ; it tells story of Gradgrind, Sissy, Louisa, and Tom ; and of course it tells the story of the circus-folk. Modern critics have especially praised this novel for its tightly organised structure. There is nothing superfluous in the book ; there is no padding ; there are no digressions ; and there are no characters who are not in one or the other way closely related to the plot.

Character-portrayal. The principal characters in this novel are Gradgrind, Bounderby, Louisa, Sissy, Harthouse, Stephen, Rachel, Mrs. Sparsit, and Mr. Sleary. Bitzer, Mrs. Gradgrind, and Mrs. Pegler are among the secondary characters. One valid criticism of the characters in this novel is that most of them are embodiments of certain concepts or ideas or principles. Gradgrind, for instance, is an embodiment of a certain theory of education ; Bounderby is a personification of utilitarianism in economics ; Bitzer is a practical product of Gradgrind's system of education ; Mrs. Sparsit represents the vanity of an aristocrat even though she has lost her aristocratic status ; and so on. But there are certain characters who are "individuals" and who, therefore, convince us as living human beings. These characters are part and parcel of the kind of life that we witness around us though they are rare. Such are Rachel, Stephen, and above all, Sissy. Even Mr. Sleary belongs to this second category of "individuals". It is noteworthy also that the portrayal of characters of the first catogary is marked by the kind of exaggeration which is frequent in Dickens ; Bounderby and Mrs. Sparsit are evidently caricatures.

Pathetic situations. Dickens is a master of pathos and his novels abound in situations that arouse the reader's deepest sympathies for those who suffer unjustly. There are a number of pathetic situations in this novel also. There is, first of all, Sissy's miserable plight when, as a small girl, she is abandoned by her father. It is another matter that Sissy is adopted by Gradgrind who looks after her well, but Sissy certainly moves us to pity at the desertion of her father, though she continues to think that her father would return to her one day. Louisa's marriage to Bounderby is also one of the pathetic situations in the novel. Louisa's interview with Gradgrind, when the latter shows himself to be utterly blind to the folly that he is committing and the former is ironical and

sarcastic in most of her remarks, moves us greatly. The two most pathetic situations in the novel, however, are firstly Louisa's flight from her husband's house to take refuge at her father's and secondly the death of Stephen. When Louisa, with a conflict raging in her breast, rushes to her father's home and, after briefly narrating her woeful story, sinks to the ground, we are deeply moved. Gradgrind's state at this time is also pitiable. In fact, he now becomes a tragic figure, and his tragedy is later aggravated by the shocking revelation that the robbery at the bank was committed not by Stephen but by his son Tom. Louisa's life is, of course, wrecked completely, and she too becomes an object of our deepest sympathy. As for Stephen, his circumstances arouse our sympathy from the very start when he is introduced to us. His relationship with Rachel, an angelic character, is one of the moving aspects of the story. This relationship ends in disaster, with Stephen dying in tragic circumstances.

The element of humour. If Dickens is a master of pathos, he is equally great in creating humour and is, indeed, one of the greatest humorists in English literature. *Hard Times* is predominantly a novel of satire, using all the weapons in a satirist's armoury: irony, sarcasm, mockery, ridicule, etc. The main targets of satire in this novel are Gradgrind (who, towards the end, becomes a tragic figure, as we have seen above), Bounderby, Mrs. Sparsit, Harthouse, and Tom. All these characters are mercilessly attacked by Dickens for their misleading philosophies, their greed, their vanities, and their totally false values in life. Apart from the element of satire, which is cruel and almost spiteful, this novel also contains humour which is playful and indulgent. This kind of humour we have in all those situations in which Mrs. Gradgrind appears. Even the scene of her death is made amusing by Dickens because of some of her absurdities. (It is another matter that Dickens's producing humour at the cost of a dying person has offended the artistic sensibilities of some critics). Indulgent humour is also provided by the manner in which Dickens portrays the character of Mr. Sleary whose lisping manner of speech, garrulity, and perpetual state of semi-drunkenness are quite amusing. The manner in which Mr. Childers and his assitant Master Kidderminster snub Bounderby and deflate his vanity is also funny. Then there are a few examples of the humour of situation in this novel. The way Tom is released from Bitzer's clutches by the trained circus-horse and the equally well-trained circus-dog, Mrs. Sparsit's chasing Louisa and at the end losing track of her and therefore feeling discomfited, Mrs. Sparsit's inability to speak and her coughing and spluttering because she is unable to say that Louisa has run away with her lover—all these are funny situations.

A fascinating novel. According to one* of the critics, *Hard Times*, though a limited success, is an endlessly fascinating work.

*Paul Edward Gray.

The school-room scenes, the description of Coketown, the hateful yet comic portrait of Bounderby, and the account of Mrs. Sparsit's frantic chase of Louisa, illustrate Dickens at his best. In these passages and scenes, the pressure of the author's language creates enduring images of locales, characters, and events, images that are liberated from the prosaic entailments of life and dependent on nothing but the genius of their maker. According to another* critic, there are sound reasons against considering *Hard Times* a masterpiece ; but it remains in his opinion a work of great distinction, which performed for the first time the very important imaginative task of integrating the factory world into the world of nature and of humanity.

*A.O.J. Cockshut.

9

"Hard Times" : Critical Approaches

I

Targets of attack. In *Hard Times* Dickens exalts instinct above reason, intuition of heart above positive knowledge. He here attacks an education built on statistics, figures, and facts ; over-whelms the positive and mercantile spirit with misfortune and ridicule ; and campaigns aganist the pride, hard heartednes, and selfishness of the businessman and the aristocrat. He here falls foul of manufacturing towns, and combats the pride, harshness, and selfishness of the merchant towns of smoke and mud, which fetter the body is an artificial atmosphere, and the mind in a factitious existence. He seeks out poor artisans, mountebanks, a foundling, and crushes beneath their common sense, generosity, delicacy, courage, and gentleness, the false science, false happines, and false virtue of the rich and powerful who despise them. He satirises oppressive society ; mourns over oppresed nature ; and his elegiac genius, like his satirical genius, finds ready to his hand, in the English world around him, the sphere which it needs for its development.

The moral. In reality the novels of Dickens can all be reduced to one simple statement. Be good, and love ; there is genuine joy only in the emotions of the heart; sensibility is the whole man. Leave science to the wise, pride to the nobles, luxury to the rich ; and have compassion on humble wretchedness ; the smallest and most despised being may in himself be worth as much as thousands of the powerful and the proud. Humanity, pity, forgiveness, are the finest things in man ; intimacy, tenderness, tears, are the sweetest things in the world.

II

The three divisions of the novel. The division of the novel into three parts, headed respectively Sowing, Reaping, Garnering, and the prefixing of a title to each chapter, help to give additional sharpness to the outline of the story, and to make its purpose more distinct to every reader.

The need of affection and fancy. The principle emphatically laid down by the author in this novel is one to which every sound heart responds. We cannot train any man properly unless we cultivate his fancy and allow fair scope to his affections. The mind will starve if fed only upon hard fact. The enforcement of this lesson is not argumentative, because no thesis can be *argued* in a novel. The method employed is an appeal to the readers' hearts. The story is not meant to prove a case because a novel is not expected to do such a thing ; its utmost purpose is to express forcibly a righteous sentiment. To run anywhere into a discussion of detail would have checked the current of a tale, which, as it stands, does not flag for the space even of a page. Dickens would like us to cultivate the kindly affections and the fancy at the same time with the intellect. But because he knows that facts and figures will not be lost sight of by the world, he leaves them, when he speaks as a novelist, to take care of themselves, and writes his tale wholly in the interest of the affections and the fancy.

Close texture. The novel is characterized by a remarkably close texture, the unsuperfluousness of it details, and a sense of design. The homely grace and tenderness of Rachel has a great appeal ; the pathos of her relationship with Stephen is fully conveyed ; and the truth and constancy of Stephen's nature are vividly depicted. The narrative is carried through a series of incidents of which the sequence has been planned with inimitable tact and skill, and the novel shows a singular closeness of purpose. The story is one written "for these times" but it will be claimed by future times as well.

III

Two groups of characters. The most successful characters in *Hard Times*, as is usual with Dickens, are those who are the simplest and least cultivated. Stephen Blackpool, Rachel, Sissy, Mr. Sleary of the horse-riding circus and his troupe, all act and talk with such simplicity of heart and nobleness of mind, that their appearance on the scene is a most welcome relief from the Gradgrinds, Bounderbys, Sparsits, etc. who are all odd characters portrayed in a quaint style. Stephen Blackpool, with his rugged steadfastness, sturdy truth, upright bearing, and fine Northern English dialect is an excellent portrait. The gentle lowly grace of Rachel, and her undeviating instinct of what is right and good, make her a fit companion to the worn and much-wronged Stephen. The story of their unfulfilled love, and its sad catastrophe, is a truly pathetic episode of humble life. But when Dickens leaves his lowly born heroes and heroines and weaves personages of more cultivated natures into his plots, the difference of execution is very marked. These other characters have the appearance of puppets which Dickens has constructed expressly for his purpose. Mr. Bounderby, for example, is a most outrageous character. Who can

believe in the possibility of such a man ? Brought up carefully, and pushed on in the world by a poôr and devoted mother, he not only pensions her off on a miserable pittance, and denies her all approach to him in his days of prosperity, but he is never introduced on the scene without being made to malign her character and that of others of his relatives, and invent lies about the way in which he lived when he was, according to his own account, thrown helpless on the world. Again, the whole of the Gradgrind family are unpleasant enough, but especially we might have been spared the melancholy spectacle of Mr. Gradgrind's death. The death-bed of an inoffensive, weak-minded woman should not have been made ridiculous especially as it does not in any way assist the plot.

IV

Humorous satirist. Allowing for the prepossessions of Dickens in writing this novel, forgetting political economists (like Adam Smith, Ricardo, and J.S. Mill), and looking at him only as a humorous satirist profoundly disgusted with some prominent evils of his day, we may warmly praise the book as one of the most perfect of its kind. The blackness of the whole repesentation of life proceeds from the Gradgrind philosophy of life, which emphasizes Fact and denounces all cultivation of the sentiments and the imagination.

The relations between Louisa and Harthouse. The relation between James Harthouse and Louisa is one of the best situations in the novel. Harthouse represents a type of character which was the object of Dickens's special aversion. Born bored, this man passes listlessly through life in a constant dread of boredom, and seeks distractions and stimulants through new experiences. Contrasted with this jaded man of fashion is Louisa, the wife of Mr. Bounderby. Far from being morally and mentally wearied by too large an experience of life, she has had no experience of life at all. Her instincts, feelings, and imagination, as a woman, have been forced back into the interior recesses of her mind by the method of her education, and are therefore ever ready to burst forth, with an impetuousnes corresponding to the force used in their repression and restraint. Now Dickens, as an English novelist, was prevented by his English sense of decorun, from describing in detail those sensuous and passionate elements in her nature which brought her to the point of agreeing to an elopement with her lover. A French novelist would have had no difficulty in this respect. As it is, the reader finds it difficult to understand the frenzy of soul, the terrible tumult of feeling, which rends the heart of Louisa as she flies to her father on the evening she has agreed to elope with her lover. Such madness as she displays in the culmination of passion might have been explained by exhibiting, step by step, the growth of her passion. Instead of this, we are overwhelmed by the sudden passage of ice into fire wilhout any warning of the perilous transformation.

Pathos. It is needless to add, in this connection, any remarks on the singular purity of the relation exsiting between Rachel and Stephen Blackpool. Any reader who can contemplate it without feeling the tears gather in his eyes is hopelessly insensible to the pathos of Dickens in its most touching manifestations.

V

The conflict between the head and the heart. In *Hard Times*, Dickens fully acknowledges the tragic extent to which intellect and affections may clash. The painful conflict between reason and emotion had been insisted upon throughout a long Christian tradition. Eighteenth-century rationlism seriously under-estimated the affective side in this conflict and the utilitarianism of the early nineteenh century retreated even further into unreality. The conception of "economic man" is a prime instance of this retreat. Utilitarianism is partly a development of eighteenth-century rationalism and partly a reaction against the romanticism which came to dominate the first decades of the nineteenth century and which stressed the importance of instincts, feelings, and imagination, of all that was spontaneous, natural, and creative in the life of man. James Mill,* in particular, set his face against the feelings, believing that the rational in man might solve all human problems ; both he and Jeremy Bentham** committed themselves to a narrow, rigid, and determinist theory of the association of ideas as the sole explanation of human psychology. Dickens, therefore, in upholding the case for affections and imagination in man is also sharing the general romantic view-point.

Dickens and Carlyle. The link between Dickens and romanticism in this respect was almost certainly Carlyle, to whom *Hard Times* was dedicated. Carlyle attacked Bentham and the notion that self-interest provided an adequate account of man's motivation, attacked the utilitarians by name, opposed their mechanistic view of life, and expressed the view that the healthy organism whether human or social functions as a totality whereas disease springs from one-sidedness and self-division. Also, Carlyle saw the grave psychological and spiritual danger in the intellectual approach to life. Dickens's dedication of *Hard Times* to Carlyle may therefore be much more significant than has been acknowledged.

The sad consequences of repressing the emotions. *Hard Times* contains the fullest exposition of Dickens's general view of human psychology. Here Dickens presents, in its most complete and convincing form, the idea of repression of human feelings. He tries to show that the conflict between reason, on one hand, and

*James Mill (1773—1836) was John Stuart Mill's father.

**Jeremy Bentham (1748—1832) was the political economist who built up utilitarianism into a full-fledged theory, the theroy of the grea est happiness of the greatest number.

instincts, affections, and imagination, on the other, may become agonizing. Such a conflict may be resolved by the conscious acceptance of both 'head' and 'heart' or it may be driven underground through faulty education and result in the stunting of personality, mental breakdown, and even crime. The result of repressing affections, instincts, and imagination in favour of a one-sided rational development is the impoverishment of Bitzer's personality, the nervous collapse of Louisa with its sexual overtones, and the degeneration of Tom into selflishness and thieving.

The repression of emotions in J.S. Mill. The autobiography of John Stuart Mill was published in 1874. Part of *Hard Times* is a remarkable forecast of Mill's own story. The novel is a surprisingly accurate prediction of the psychological consequences of a given philosophical attitude passing into an educational system. The early chapters of J.S. Mill's autobiography show that there is no exaggeration in the picture Dickens gives us of Gradgrind's education of his children. What is more, Mill experienced a neurotic breakdown in his adolescence and eventually acknowledged the claims of the emotions both in his own life and in his philosophical idea. He gradually modified and softened the harsh and rigid utilitarianism of Bentham and of his father (James Mill).

VII

Pamphleteering literature. There is little truly representative of Dickens in *Hard Times*, beyond the sincerity and ardour with which he champions the unfortunates bleeding under the wheels of modern industrialism. The proper place for *Hard Times* is with the pamphleteering literature of Carlyle and Ruskin to the former of whom it was dedicated, whilst the latter gave the book a cordial welcome. Ruskin, however, did not hesitate to point out how much more effective the book would have been, as a controversial tract, had the writer used a "severer and more accurate analysis." But this was asking the impossible of Dickens. Dickens surely made a special journey to Preston to be eye witness of a workers' strike. He tried honestly to make himself master of of the subject and to handle it impartially. But, as to analysis, his mind had never been trained for it, and was perhaps constitutionally incapable of it. He could be relied upon to champion the weak in any hostilities between rich and poor, capitalist and wage-earner. Hence his study of the situation between capital and labour turned into nothing but a heated protest. There is prejudice in his statement of the case ; the conclusion is forestalled from the beginning.

VIII

The book as social controversy. By sheer scorn and indignation, Dickens galvanized his two personifications of blind slave-driving energy and greed, Gradgrind and Bounderby, into a semblance of life. Like some of his more authentic creations, these two

have found a permanent place in thought and speech. All the more so, in as much as the book itself has now become a chapter, or at least a famous page, in the annals of social controversy. Thomas Gradgrind has at any rate some redeeming points as a figure of satire. As for Bounderby, he has been described by Ruskin as "a dramatic monster, instead of a characteristic example of a worldly monster". However, this man is really very close to actual fact. But the reason why fact does not help much in fiction is suggested by Chesterton who says of this novel, "It is perheps the one place where Dickens, in defending happiness, for a moment forgets to be happy." Dickens had thrown himself on the defensive, and so had to be as aggressive as possible, and do his worst for those whom he simply conceived as the enemy. He could not afford the least touch of geniality to Gradgrind and Bounderby. And he had to wring pathos and nothing but pathos out of the tragedy of Stephen Blackpool and Rachel. Nothing was permitted to relieve the tension but the byplay of such casual onlookers as his riding masters, Mr. E.W.B. Childers and Mr. Sleary, the former "so justly celebrated for his daring vaulting act", and the latter with his lisped aphorisms : "Make the betht of uth ; not wurtht*........."

Unconvincing portrayal of the working class. George Gissing, expressing an adverse opinion, says that Dickens in his novels shows us poor men who suffer under tyranny and exclaims against the hardship of things, but that he does not portray any representative wage-earner who was in those days to be seen battling for bread and justice. One reason for this deficiency, according to this critic, is that Dickens did not know the north of England. With adequate knowledge of a manufacturing town, Dickens would never have written so unconvincingly as he did in his book *Hard Times*, a book which provided an opportunity to him for dealing with this subject. Stephen Blackpool, says this critic, represents nothing at all ; he is a mere model of meekness, and his great misfortune is such as might recall anyone anywhere, the misfortune being a drunken wife. The book is a crude attack on materialism, a theme which might have entered very well into a study of the disgruntled and agitating working-class. But the working-class, says this critic, was not Dickens's field even in London.

IX

Characters bitterly exaggerated. G.K. Chesterton expresses the view that *Hard Times* strikes an almost unexpected note of severity. The characters are indeed exaggerated, but they are bitterly and deliberately exaggerated ; they are not exaggerated with the previous spontaneous high spirits which the author exhibited in his exaggeration of such persons as Nicholas Nickleby and Martin

* *i.e.*, "Make the best of us ; not the worst."

Chuzzlewit. According to Chesterton, Dickens exaggerates Bounderby because he really hates him, while Dickens had exaggerated Pecksniff because he really loved him. *Hard Times* is not one of the greatest books of Dickens ; but it is perhaps in a sense one of his greatest monuments. It emphatically records Dickens's genuine emotion on a number of things which were then considered unphilosophical grumblings, but which since have swelled into the tremendous phenomenon of the socialist philosophy.

Dickens a Liberal, but not an individualist. To call Dickens a socialist, says Chesterton, would be a wild exaggeration. However, Dickens's position might be expressed thus : that even when everybody thought that liberalism meant individualism he was emphatically a Liberal and emphatically not an individualist. Or the position might be better still stated in the following manner : that he saw that there was such a thing as humanity to which both extreme socialism and extreme individualism were profoundly indifferent. This thing, called humanity, was what he happened to understand.

X

A prophetic work. G.B. shaw regards the books of Dickens's second period of his literary career, from *Hard Times* to *Our Mutual Friend*, as being much more important than books of his first period. The books of the second period, says Shaw, can be perused by mature and thoughtful readers as serious social history. In his preface to *Hard Times*, Shaw has emphasised the turning point which this novel marks in Dickens's development from the satirist and reformer into the conscious and resolute prophet. In other words, while Dickens was a satirist and reformer during his first period, he now becomes a prophet with certain firm convictions to which he gives an emphatic expression.

XI

Not a socialistic, but pro-capitalistic book. According to George Orwell, Dickens's target in his novels is in reality not so much society as "human nature". It would be difficult to point anywhere in his books to a passage suggesting that the economic system is wrong as a system. Nowhere, for instance, does he make any attack on private enterprise or private property. Even in a book like *Our Mutual Friend*, he does not suggest that individuals ought not to have an irresponsible power to execute idiotic wills. Of course, we may draw this inference for ourselves, and we can draw it again from the author's remarks about Bounderby's will at the end of *Hard Times*. Indeed, from the whole of Dickens's work we can infer the evil of laissez-faire capitalism ; but Dickens himself draws no such inference. It is said that Macaulay strongly disapproved of what he called the "sullen socialism" of *Hard Times*. Actually there is not a single line in this book that can properly be called socialistic. On the contrary, the tendency

of the book is, if anything, pro-capitalistic, because its whole moral is that capitalists should be kind-hearted. It is not suggested anywhere that workers should be rebellious. Bounderby is a bullying wind-bag, and Gradgrind is depicted as having completely mistaken ideas about education and children's upbringing. But Dickens seems to suggest that, if men like Bounderby and Gradgrind were better men, the system of which they were a part would work well enough. So far as social criticism goes, nothing more than this can be extracted from this novel or any of his other novels. His whole message could be summed up in a sentence which suggests no social philosophy at all, and that sentence is : If men would behave decently, the world would be a comfortable and decent place to live in.

XII

The dramatic contrast between the utilitarian industrial civilisation and a reciprocal exchange of love. J.H. Miller dwells upon the dramatic contrast which constitutes the theme of the novel. The novel shows in symbolic terms the opposition between a soul-destroying adherence to a utilitarian industrial civilisation on one hand and the reciprocal exchange of love on the other. The utilitarian industrial civilisation is a condition in which everything is weighed, measured, has its price, and from which emotion is totally excluded. This civilisation is symbolised by the clanking machinery of the Coketown factories which turn men into "hands". The other extreme, namely a reciprocal exchange of love, is symbolised by the horse-riding circus. In the author's own words there was a remarkable gentleness and childishness about members of the circus troupe, a special inaptitude for any kind of sharp practice, and an untiring readiness to help and pity one another.

XIII

The characters invented to demonstrate a theory. *Hard Times*, says Lionel Stevenson, is more strictly centred upon a single social theme than the other novels. Dickens began with the conscious purpose of examining the relationship between industrialists and workers in the new manufacturing cities, and of discrediting the utilitarian philosophy which was the ideological basis of the capitalistic society of the time. This purpose had been foreshadowed in *Dombey and Son* and *Bleak House*. But in those novels he had started with characters and evolved the social implications. In *Hard Times*, however, the characters were obvsously invented to demonstrate the theory. This novel contains none of the richly elaborated comic figures that live so abundantly in his other books. Dickens began by studying the reports of the newly organised national system of education, and he even visited a strike-bound manufacturing town to witness an industrial conflict at first hand. The characters in this novel are neatly arranged in symmetrical groups,

either to represent labour versus capital or to contrast the inhibited and repressed children of a model school with the fun-loving members of a circus troupe.

Dickens's scorn for utilitarian economists. The angry scorn for utilitarian economists, says this critic, was derived directly from Carlyle. (And to Carlyle was the novel dedicated). Gradgrind, with his theory of facts and statistics, is a complete embodiment of what Carlyle hated with all his heart, namely the ruthless "logic grinder". And Dickens is caught in the same dilemma that troubles much of Carlyle's thinking. Both were strong believers in individual responsibility and freedom of choice as were the champions of the theory of laissez-faire ; and yet both had no faith in any organised system for promoting human welfare. In the past Dickens had attacked charitable institutions and the Poor Laws ; and in this novel he assails the new phenomenon of the labour unions which he saw as an unjustified denial of the worker's right to choose his job. Perhaps the least convincing character in the story is the demogogic trade union organiser. Almost equally lacking in truth to life is the nominal hero, Stephen Blackpool, the honest workman who is sacrificed between the conflicting interests of the union and the employers.

Its tightly organised structure. Being the only novel of Dickens that is openly revolutionary in its implications, *Hard Times* was much admired by such redical social thinkers as Ruskin and and Bernard Shaw ; and for its tightly organised structure it has been praised by some modern critics who exalt form as the main criterion of fiction. But most readers have always ranked it lower than Dickens's other works, not for its subversive economic views or even for its depressing picture of human greed, but simply because its characters fail to come alive.

10

"Hard Times" As A Social Novel

I

Opposed to the costliness of divorce. There are two theses in *Hard Times*. One is clear enough and pertains to the divorce laws. Through the character, Stephen Blackpool, whose wife is a drunken and almost brutish woman, Dickens expresses his indignation at the costliness of divorce, which remains a privilege of the rich. (He may have been thinking already, in 1854, of the possible collapse of his own married life).

The other social purpose. The second social purpose of *Hard Times* is more difficult to define. It seems to be concerned with a radical criticism of the very structure of society. Dickens is opposed to the oppression of the poor and of the workers by the rich. But his attitude is partly obscured by his wish to attack, simultaneously, a particular school of economic thinkers, so that his conclusions in that direction remain indistinct. Besides, other elements interfere with the clarity and pungency with which social ideas are expressed in this novel.

An important speech by Stephen. The suffering of the poor and the cruelty of the privileged class find a sincere expression in Stephen's defence of the workers when he is interrogated by Bounderby. Asked by Bounderby what the workers, in a general way, complain of, Stephen replies.*

> "Indeed we are in a muddle, sir. Look round town — so rich as it is— and see the numbers of people as have been brought into being here, for to weave, and to card, and to piece out a living, all the same one way, somehow, 'twixt their cradles and graves. Look how we live, and where we live, and in what numbers, and by what chances, and with what sameness ; and look how the mills is always a-going, and how they never works us no nigher to any distant object—

* Stephen speaks, of course, in his native Lancashire dialect, but his speech has here been rendered into ordinary English to make it easier for the student to follow.

> excepting always death. Look how you considers of us, and writes of us, and talks of us, and goes up with your deputations to Secretaries of State about us, and how you are always right, and how we are always wrong. Look how this has grown and grown, bigger and bigger, broader and broader, harder and harder, from year to year, from generation to generation. Who can look on it sir, and fairly tell a man it's not a muddle ?"

This speech clearly defines what, according to Dickens, lies at the root of social evil in general. Another relevant speech in this connection is the one Stephen makes, when dying, about the number of deaths that have been caused by the mine-pit into which he himself had fallen.

Attack on utilitarians. Dickens's attack on the utilitarians of his time is also part of the social purpose of this novel. The opening words of the novel are a parody of the utilitarian doctrine : "Now, what I want is Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life." The portrait of Mr. Gradgrind is no less characteristic : "Thomas Gradgrind, sir. A man of realities. A man of facts and calculations". Nor can we ignore the conversation between Mr. Gradgrind and his young daughter Louisa, when the decision about her marriage with the 55-year old Bounderby is taken. The arguments offered by Mr. Gradgrind to convince his daughter show a mind dried up by its habitual worship of a systematic theory. The scene is one of the most successful in the book. To prove to his daughter that she need not take into account the disparity in years between Bounderby and herself, Mr. Gradgrind quotes statistics. Love he declares to be in this context irrelevant, and calls it a "misplaced expression". Dickens seems to have harboured great distrust and dislike of all makers of statistics.

Dickens's dislike of workers' unions. Dickens has nothing positive to offer to improve the state of affairs. His thinking in these matters is not systematic and not capable of being formulated. This deficiency is most glaring in chapters devoted to the trade union agitation in Coketown. He seems to have distrusted the trade unions, and has therefore presented the Coketown agitators in a very ugly light. Dickens's attitude can hardly be regarded as surprising in view of his unfortunate youthful experiences in the House of Commons as a reporter and his own subsequent life-long contempt for all political bodies. But it is never satisfactorily explained why Stephen Blackpool in this novel refuses to join the workers' union, preferring to be ostracized, when he is a genuine believer in the workers' cause. To Dickens himself, it was enough of a reason that Stephen had given a promise to Rachel, but the promise has no solid cause behind it. Stephen's attitude is

one of the mainsprings of the novel's action, so that a considerable part of the book becomes unconvincing. Dickens's dislike of the workers' union seriously weakens the defence of the workers he had intended to effect in this book.

A kind of sentimental socialism. Handicapped by his distrust of workers' union, Dickens did not succeed in putting forward a clear and coherent thesis. His attitude can be defined as a kind of sentimental socialism. He was conscious of the existence of a problem, but it was one that acted on his emotions rather than on his intelligence. The solutions that he perhaps contemplated were of the benevolent, patronizing kind. He placed his trust in the kindness of enlightened employers to secure for the workers the decent life to which they had a right.

II

Satire against a kind of thought. *Hard Times* is one of Dickens's most thought-about books. In the fifties his novels begin to show a greater complication of plot than before; one reason for this is that he was intending to use them as a vehicle of a more concentrated sociological argument. All his journalism shows too that he was *thinking* much more about social problems, whereas earlier he had been content to feel mainly and to record a thought, when it occurred, in emotional dress. The objection to such a character as Gradgrind is not just that he is a burlesque and an exaggeration but rather that in him the satire is directed against a kind of thought. He is in fact the only major Dickens character who is meant to be "intellectual". Dickens was caught with the idea of a man living by a certain philosophy. However, Dickens did not understand enough of any philosophy even to be able to ridicule it successfully.

The idea of personality in an individual industrial worker. In Stephen Blackpool, Dickens tried to rescue the idea of personality in an individual industrial worker. Stephen defeated by the law, the trade union, and his employer might have become the material of genuine tragedy, if Dickens had been prepared to accept his death from the beginning as inevitable and unanswerable; but he was hankering all the time after a solution to avoid the proper tragic solution, and the result is nothing but a slow record of inglorious misery and defeat. Dickens did not want to admit that Stephen's bargaining power against Bounderby, or against his marriage, or against life itself, was negligible, but wrote as if there might be an unexpected solution at every turn. The crux is of course in the part of the plot that deals with the trade union, and three points have been emphasized here: (*i*) Stephen's inexplicable obstinacy in refusing to join it; (*ii*) Dickens's hatred of Slackbridge; and (*iii*) the difference of mood and attitude of the

other workers towards Stephen as men and as union members under Slackbridge's influence.

Attitude towards industrialism: The failure of *Hard Times* in two main strands of its plot, and in so many of its major characters, does not lessen the force of the mixture of fascination and repulsion that Dickens felt for the industrial scene. The repulsion is more marked ; but underlying it there is ceaseless indignation at the impoverishment of human life that resulted from industrialism. This indignation is not crude or immature anger, but rather a disturbed mood that colours every perception, contributing a good deal to the unpopularity of this book.

III

Narrative insufficiency. *Hard Times* is an indictment of Victorian society. Of all Dickens's books, this is the clearest in its statement of his economic beliefs. However, for various reasons, its thesis is not fully developed ; Dickens did not find enough room for developing his contrasting plot sequences. He also had difficulty in focusing all his narrative technical resources on his subject, so that the novel does not call upon many of his best devices. One needs a relatively large scope for many contrasting plots in action. The novel sometimes gives the effect of choppy episodes, of undeveloped contrasts, of unfinished business.

A satire on utilitarian economy. *Hard Times* retains force because of its purpose, It was influenced materially by Carlyle's economic ideas. As the novel stands, its thesis is a satire on utilitarian economy. Dickens felt that a dependence upon capitalistic practicality without reference to sympathy and brotherly understanding causes continued difficulties in the relations of capital and labour. His scene was Manchester or Leeds or some other such industrial centre, and he called the place "Coketown". However, the thesis of the novel includes also criticism of the educational system, the caste system, and divorce laws.

A warning to capitalists. Dickens's criticism of the economic system is quite plain. He is obviously opposed to the excesses of selfish capitalism; he knows that too many workers are underpaid. If labourers do not get a fair chance to make a reasonable living, there will be trouble. He urges utilitarian economists and commissioners of fact to cultivate in the poor the utmost graces of the fancies and the affections, lest Reality should take a wolfish turn and make an end of the rich. This view indicates that Dickens is aware of the threat of revolution or other violence.

Strikes and violence futile. Yet Stephen, a sympathetic* character, does not join the workers' union. The union

"A sympathetic character" means a character who wins the reader's sympathy.

leader, Slackbridge, speaks in a most offensive manner, and the general impression of the union is that it forms because foolish capitalists will make no concessions to reality. At the same time, Dickens's description of the workers implies that strikes and violence do not help in the long run.

The criterion of judgment. *Hard Times* should be judged on its artistic merits : it should not be underestimated because of its narrative insufficiency, nor overestimated because its thesis appeals to the reader who is concerned with weaknesses in the capitalistic system.

11

"Hard Times"—A Condemnation of Utilitarianism, Materialism, and Laissez Faire

Condemnation of the ethos of industrialism. An eminent critic decribes *Hard Times* as an analysis and a condemnation of the ethos of industrialism. Dickens's violent hostility to industrial capitalism and its entire scheme of life is unmistakable in this novel. He here reveals the state of modern society as it appears to him.

Revolt against the industrial order. According to Bernard Shaw, this novel shows the points of contact between Dickens on one hand, and Karl Marx, Carlyle, Ruskin, and Morris on the other. Here Dickens rises up against civilization itself as a disease and declares that it is not social disorder but the kind of social order we have that is horrible, that it is not our criminals but our industrial magnates who are robbing and murdering the people. "Here you will find," says Shaw, "no more villains and heroes, but only oppressors and victims, oppressing and suffering in spite of themselves, driven by a huge machinery which grinds to pieces the people it should nourish and ennoble, and having for its directors the basest and most foolish of us instead of the noblest and most far-sighted". The indignation of Dickens's earlier novels has here deepened into a passionate revolt against the whole industrial order of the modern world.

The change in technique in this novel. Dickens intended this novel to be a formidable and concentrated assault upon the iniquity of a heartless materialism. For this reason he here adopts a technique somewhat different from that in his earlier novels. He here avoids giving us miscellaneous scenes, both comic and pathetic, depicting in detail the domestic as well as industrial life of the workmen. He gives us no scenes pertaining to the clerks in Bounderby's bank and no scenes relating to the labourers at work in Bounderby's factories. Nor does he introduce any scenes of the

home life of the factory workers (apart from a couple of brief episodes relating to Stephen and Rachel).

A morality drama. The result of this change in technique in that this novel becomes a morality drama, stark, formalized, allegorical, dominated by the mood of piercing through to the underlying meaning of the industrial scene rather than describing it in minute detail. For this reason Coketown, which might be any English industrial town, is drawn once for all in a few powerful strokes : "It was a town of red brick, or of brick that would have been red if the smoke and ashes had allowed it ; but as matters stood it was a town of unnatural red and black like the painted face of a savage. It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys ...." (Book I, Chapter V).

Characters as symbols. Every packed detail of this entire setting is surcharged with significant emotional and intellectual comment, and every character serves to deepen and intensify the meaning. Josiah Bounderby, banker and manufacturer, is a personification of the blatant greed and callous inhumanity of this industrial world. Thomas Gradgrind, retired wholesale hardware dealer, man of facts and figures, is an embodiment of the utilitarian economic theory and its effort to reduce human life to statistical averages. Young Tom, devoted first and only to his own advantage, is the mean product of the paternal theories : "that not unprecedented triumph of calculation which is usually at work on number one*". The daughter Louisa is the predestined tragic victim of those theories, going to her doom, in her face "a light with nothing to rest upon, a fire with nothing to burn."** The consummate achievement of Mr. Gradgrind's system is represented by Bitzer, one of the pupils educated at Gradgind's model school : for Bitzer everything is a matter of bargain and sale ; he is accessible to no appeal except that of self-interest.

Sissy, a symbol of instinctive life. By contrast, Sissy Jupe symbolizes vitality, generosity, uncalculating goodness. She was born and nourished among the circus-people whose activities are not dominated by pure utility but represent artistic values. Her early life was lived freely and richly from the deep instinctive and emotional springs, and she resists (unknowingly and naturally) the influence of a utilitarian education or the influence of Gradgrindery.

Fact and the utilitarian calculus. In the world of Gradgrind, only fact and the utilitarian calculus have a place, and they occupy a commanding position. There is no room in this world for imagination, fancy, emotion. Bitzer's definition of the horse shows the kind of facts to which Gradgrind attaches the greatest importance—

*Page 69 of the novel

**Page 22.

the cut-and-dried facts of intellectual definition, not the facts of living and breathing reality which Sissy knows from her association with Mr. Sleary's circus and its horse-riding. Gradgrind obliterates human identity too, by addressing Sissy as Girl Number Twenty. Dickens also refers ironically to the new schoolmaster as having been produced with "some one hundred and forty other schoolmasters in the same factory, on the same principles, like so many pianoforte legs."

Greed for power and material success. The principles that dominate Gradgrind's school are the principles that dominate Coketown and its industry. His philosophy based on hard facts is only a blunt formulation of the inhumane spirit of Victorian materialism. In Gradgrind himself, this philosophy, though abhorrent, is at least honest and disinterested. In Bounderby, who is the embodiment of this philosophy in the commercial world, and who makes no effort to hide his obssessive self-interest, the same philosophy becomes unlimited greed for power and material success. In Bounderby this philosophy of the Victorian "rugged individualism" is seen in its ugliest and most vulgar form. Bounderby represents the practice of that business ethos for which "the relations between master and man were all fact, and everything was fact between the lying-in hospital and the cemetery."

Dickens's kinship with Carlyle's thought. Dickens shows a wonderful insight and a brilliant wit in his condemnation of *laissez faire* capitalism. He surpasses even Carlyle in the latter's burning denunciation of the dismal science of classical economic theory or the heartlessness of the cash-nexus* as the only link between man and man. When Stephen and Rachal part (in Book II, Chapter VI), Dickens utters a prophetic warning to "utilitarian economists, skeletons of schoolmasters, Commissioners of Fact" and calls upon them to cultivate in the poor "the utmost graces of the fancies and affections to adorn their lives so much in need of ornament" because otherwise "Reality" will turn "wolfish" and take its revenge. To Stephen, too, Dickens gives a denunciation of *laissez faire* and the division it creates in society. Stephen points out to Bounderby the terrible blunder that factory-owners are committing, treating the workers as figures in a sum or as machines, without loves and likings, without memories and inclinations, without souls to weary and souls to hope, and he points out the "unpassable world" that will separate the factory-owners and the workers. When Stephen's crushed body is taken out of the pit into which he had fallen, his dying words are like the words of the crushed workers themselves speaking from the pit into which the modern world has fallen.

Utilitarianism versus non-utilitarianism. Through his heartless philosophy, Gradgrind is struck down, and through his

*cash-nexus : the relationship between man and man as based on money ; the mercenary motive operating in human relations.

inconsistent deed of kindness in adopting Sissy he and his family are ultimately saved. It is because of his blindness to the life of imagination and emotions, and the mechanical crudity of his philosophy that his son becomes a selfish sneak and thief, and his favourite Louisa suffers a dark emptiness in her heart. And it is Sissy's loving heart which proves to be a source of strength to Gradgrind and Louisa in the end. Through Sissy, and through Sleary's non-utilitarian gratitude for Gradgrind's kindness to her, comes the resolution of the remaining part of the story—the escape of Tom from the clutches of the law. Both Tom and Bitzer defend their actions in words that echo Gradgrind's own utilitarian philosophy and Gradgrind's own jargon.

Love and art. Sleary, no economist to the last, refuses any financial reward. He tells Gradgrind, though in a different context, that there is a love in the world, not all self-interest after all; and that love has a way of its own of calculating or not calculating. And, as for the circus artists, Sleary justifies their function of amusing the people because people cannot always be a-learning, and a-working. The final scenes of the novel contain Dickens's entire indictment of 19th-century industrial society and the essence of his defence of art. Only through a cultivation of art, humane feelings, and the imaginative faculty is it possible to counter the monstrous cruelty of the industrial system which nourishes only materialism and the lust for money.

Jeremy Bentham was the founder of Utilitarianism
~~followers — Carlyle.~~
Mechanical attitude — great change.
School of fact = that of fancy
\gradgrind /circus
Reality of life exists for facts + only those
[illegible]ings are included that can be measured.
Rebellious Children — the result of Utilitarian[illegible]
Ut— . — Industrialism — social Evil
— H. Unhappiness. Not value of blood but
wealth. Rejected by them. — the system.
[illegible]hould get pleasure from every
[illegible]eans — right or wrong.
of pleasure is same — Poetry = game [illegible]
Laissez Faire — every person is

12

"Hard Times" As The Tragedy of Mr. Gradgrind

From one angle it is possible to regard *Hard Times* as a tragedy in spite of its brilliantly ironic and comic portraits ; and the tragedy centres not, as most readers might think, on Stephen Blackpool but on Mr. Grindgrind. Gradgrind's tragedy is the result of his ignoring Sissy's kind of truth for Bitzer's.

In his first encounter with Sissy, Gradgrind tells her that in his school they do not want the kind of knowledge of horses that she possesses—the deep intimate knowledge which comes from living and working with them. Rather they want Bitzer's knowledge, which counts the horse's teeth and tells its age. Grandgrind is not, however, another Bounderby for he is possessed by an *idea*. This idea is odious in itself but it is disinterestedly held and applied, something truly believed in ; this idea is very different from the vain and false blustering pride of Bounderby. As the author tells us after Louisa has come back to her father to seek his help in her wretched plight, Gradgrind had only meant to do right, had meant to do great things, and had pursued his idea with greater singleness of purpose than any of his co-workers in the political sphere. It is this uprightness and singleness which make him capable of tragedy, and it is the mean and demoralizing smallness of his vision which make his tragedy inevitable. His system has all but blinded him to the reality of human emotions ; yet he maintains a crucial sanity through his love for his children. And it is through the disasters that he has led them into that he is brought face to face with the truth about his own system. It is his tragedy that he is brought to humility and a kind of wisdom through a catastrophe, to those he has genuinely loved, for which he was ultimately responsible. The tragedy is the more painful in that the greatest permanent harm is done not to himself but to those who ultimately mean more to him than he himself does. Louisa and Tom are sacrificed to Gradgrind's obsession, their lives ruined irreparably. Dickens does not flinch here.

The quality of this tragedy is brought most directly to the surface in the scene in which Gradgrind tells Louisa of Bounderby's proposal of marriage, in the scene of her return home, and in the scene of Tom's final exposure. The situation in the first scene is in itself ironic, and Dickens's treatment is ironic likewise. The irony derives from, indeed expresses, a deep and sustained sympathetic understanding of a melancholy human situation—of two persons most intimately related, and whose speech is almost totally at cross-purposes. Gradgrind is disconcerted and emb arrassed by the calm with which Louisa receives the news ; he is amazed that his system should after all have had such a triumph in her. So he counters her forthright use of the simple terms of human feeling with statistical irrelevancies. But when she tries to being home to him the human reality of the life he has prepared for her and to inject human meaning into the relationship he holds open to her, his misunderstanding is total.

Louisa says, among other things, "What do I know, father, of tastes and fancies, of aspirations and affections, of all that part of my nature in which such light things have been nourished ?" And her eminently practical parent replies, "My dear, quite true, quite true." Gradgrind is blinded by all his preconception to the true meaning of what Louisa says. Her almost scornful reminder to him of all that she has missed in life serves only to confirm him in his idea that her upbringing has been perfect. Louisa's scornful tone continues and she becomes even sarcastic when she says : "You have dealt so wisely with me, father, from my cradle to this hour that I never had a child's belief or a child's fear". Louisa's words stand out like a challenge to her father who interprets them literally, thinking that he really has been most wise in depriving her of a child's natural fears, dreams, beliefs, etc. The combination of pathos and irony in this whole scene is remarkable and we already see Louisa as a doomed figure, though her father at this stage feels almost jubilant at what he believes to be the willing acceptance by his daughter of Bounderby's proposal.

The second scene between father and daughter is stark tragedy. Louisa arrives at her father's house in an extremely agitated frame of mind. She does not mince matters now ; there is no need of irony or sarcasm here. What she says is a downright and blunt attack upon his theory of education which made him ignore her sensibilities and affections during her girlhood and bring her up by the rules and calculations of arithmetic. She castigates him for having handed her over to Bounderby in marriage regardless of her feelings in the matter. "I never made a pretence to him or you that I loved him", she says to her father, "I knew and, father, you knew and he knew, that I never did". Gradgrind is intensely moved by Louisa's tale of woe ; he is no monster like Bounderby ;

he is deeply human ; his heart melts with pity for his favourite child : "Her father's face was ashy white, and he held her in both his arms". "Ashy white," yes ; and his entire theory of facts, figures, definitions. statistics and the like lies in ashes as his daughter sinks to the ground, overcome by the conflict* that had been raging in her breast. This is the high point of Gradgrind's tragedy. Next morning he tells Louisa that as a consequence of her account of her married life, "the ground on which I stand has ceased to be solid under my feet." He finds the shock of what she told him "to be very heavy indeed." He confesses the failure of his doctrines. "Some person hold," he says, "that there is a wisdom of the Head, and that there is a wisdom of the Heart. I have not supposed so. I have supposed the head to be all-sufficient." In poignant tones, he goes on to say: "Oh, my child, my child! I am an unhappy man to see you thus! What avails it to me that you do not reproach me, if I so bitterly reproach myself!"

The third scene is again a mixture of pathos and irony. This scene only aggravates the tragedy of Gradgrind, because the real tragedy is enacted in the scene already examined above. The shock that his son committed the robbery at the bank is certainly very great for Gradgrind, but it cannot be greater than the blow that has already been dealt to him by the collapse of Louisa's marriage. But in this third scene Gradgrind does witness finally the stupidity and worthlessness of his whole "system," When Gradgrind tells his son that he would not have been shocked so much if a thunderbolt had fallen upon him as he has felt shocked by his criminal deed, the son gives the following memorable reply :

> "I don't see why. So many people are employed in situations of trust ; so many people, out of so many, will be dishonest. I have heard you talk, a hundred times, of its being a law. How can I help laws? You have comforted others with such things, father. Comfort yourself."

This passage is one of the highwater marks of Dickens's art ; it contains the satirical *reductio ad absurdum* of Gradgrind's philosophy. The situation has its elements of comedy—the oddity of Gradgrind sitting on a clown's chair, Tom's grotesque costume, his preposterous self-excusing logic which is so close a parody of Gradgrind's own that his father has no answer to it. But the overall impression is certainly not comic. The clown's chair in the middle of the ring intensifies our sense of Gradgrind's forlorn loneliness amid the ruins of all his life's beliefs. Tom's fantastic and squalid appearance gives physical expression to his disgrace and suggests, as he bites straw and has hands like a monkey's. that he has become something less than human. The scene is an extremely painful

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*The conflict was between her conscience on one hand and the temptation to run away with Harthouse on the other.

one. On hearing his son's reply, "the father buried his face in his hands" And that is all he could do under the circumstances : it is his own philosophy taking its vengeance upon him. And if the vengeance is somewhat incomplete at this point, the slight deficiency is made up a little later by Bitzer who, when reminded by Gradgrind of his having been a pupil at his school, retorts that he had been paying full fees for the schooling. The author's comment here gives the finishing touches to the picture of the collapse of Gradgrind's philosophy :

> It was a fundamental principle of the Gradgrind philosophy that everything was to be paid for. Nobody was ever on any account to give anybody anything, or render anybody help without purchase. Gratitude was to be abolished, and the virtues springing from it were not to be.

Gradgrind's story has the representative generality of true tragedy, seen by the author compassinately yet with a disinterested care for truth. We are incomparably more moved by Gradgrind's wretchedness than by Stephen's. Stephen's story is imperfectly related to the book's central theme and seems, in fact, to be forced upon the reader.

13

"Hard Times" : Structure and Plot-Construction

I

Tightly organised structure. *Hard Times* has been praised by a number of modern critics for its tightly organised structure. Indeed, it is "a brilliantly plotted novel." The action in this novel moves on with a sense of single-minded, concentrated energy which is almost unique in Dickens. In reading its story, we are gripped by a sense of inevitability. It is a wonderfully compact novel, free from digressions, padding, superfluous matter, and unnecessary details. One reason for its compactness is, of course, its brevity which allows no room for irrelevancies.

The main theme. The tragedy of Gradgrind, whom we meet in the very opening chapter, grows out of the evil that he has allowed to dominate him before the commencement of the story. In the opening chapters the tension between two opposing attitudes ("fancy" and "fact") is clearly revealed. The ultimate catastrophe is the direct consequence of this tension. The psychological development of Louisa and Tom, who are to carry the main burden of the consequences of evil, is perfectly sound in inception and fully convincing in narration: Louisa's emotional life has no outlet except her affection for her brother Tom; the only way she sees to turn her adult life to any advantage is to use it to promote her brother's interest. That is why she agrees to marry Bounderby; and in the emotional void of her marriage, surprisingly, finds herself attracted by Harthouse who produces in her a feeling that she has a right to have an existence of her own. Tom, on his part, has fully learnt the lesson that self-interest should be the governing principle of life, and so he becomes a "triumph of calculation". He inevitably sinks into debt, and then goes one step lower to commit a robbery at the bank where he is employed.

Interweaving of different strands. The different strands of the plot are interwoven with exceptional skill and

economy. Tom's mean and cunning trick on Stephen Blackpool is entirely convincing in itself. He does not really intend any harm to Stephen and cannot foresee the terrible outcome of his action, by which he merely wanted to prevent the suspicion from falling upon himself. In fact, he does not see Stephen, or any one else, as a person who can suffer but as an object that his self-interest can make use of, as he has made use of Louisa. At the same time the subsidiary theme of the isolation and alienation of Stephen is carried further by Tom's action, as it is by the previous move, when Bounderby dismisses Stephen from the latter's job.

The flaw in Dickens's picture of the trade union leader. However, there is a serious flaw, both in Dickens's perception and in the plot that derives from the industrial aspect of the novel. Dickens, of course, had a very imperfect knowledge of factory life in northern England. He did make a visit to the town of Preston to witness a workers' strike but got little from it and did not in fact include a strike in his novel. And, as Shaw has pointed out, the scene of trade union meeting addressed by Slackbridge is simply an expression of middle-class ignorance. Dickens simply deplores the trade unions and therefore gives us a trade union agitator in Slackbridge who is dishonest and wicked. Possibly there were such leaders in the early trade union movement, but even so Slackbridge should have found no place in this novel where Dickens aims so much at the representative. Slackbridge is presented as the chief evidence against trade unionism as such. Dickens seems to regard trade unionism as an evil thing ; and to prove his view he represents the leader as a crook and a scoundrel ; he also represents the workers as fools for joining a union led by such a man. The action of Stephen's fellow-workers in sending him to Coventry is thus made to appear grossly unfair.

Stephen's story imperfectly related to the central theme. Dickens not only shows his ignorance of a very important social and economic movement, but by bringing out the trade union theme in this particular way he sets up a cross-current which he cannot control and which is imperfectly related to the book's central theme. Gradgrind's story has the representative generality of true tragedy, seen compassionately yet with a disinterested care for truth. But in Stephen's case Dickens did not take the trouble of finding out the truth. So we are far more moved by Gradgrind's wretchedness than by Stephen's. Stephen's story seems all the time to be twisting our arm.

II

Gradgrind, the centre of the main action. There are three separate plot-sequences in *Hard Times*, each of them offering to the novelist opportunities for development and contrast. The

main action centres round Thomas Gradgrind, a retired wholesale merchant who becomes a member of Parliament. Gradgrind is Mr. Utilitarian, a "man of realities, a man of facts and calculations. a man who proceeds upon the principle that two and two are four and nothing over." Gradgrind speaks mathematically, making no allowances for the tender or softer emotions. He conducts all the business of life in a "practical" manner because this is the way one gets ahead, makes money, and becomes financially and socially successful according to Victorian standards. Gradgrind bows to the god of cash-payment, and so he brings up his children according to this philosophy.

The first complication in the main action. The plot-divisions show how this utilitarian philosophy works out. Louisa, Tom, and Sissy belong to the main division of the action. Louisa is given in marriage to the capitalist, Bounderby, and feels tempted to escape from her resulting unhappiness by an affair with Harthouse who offers her admiration and some excitement. This temptation is the first complication in the main action of the plot. Dickens handles it by showing his heroine on the verge of yielding to temptation, but successfully overcoming it at the last moment. Certainly, her father's philosophy and his way of having brought her up have proved of no help to her.

The second complication in the main action. By contrast with his sister, Tom is ruined by his environment. He is depicted as selfish, ill-natured, sensual, and completely mercenary. He is employed as a clerk in a bank owned by his sister's husband, Bounderby, and he eventually steals money from the bank in order to cover his gambling debts. He contrives a scheme to throw the blame on Stephen, a worker in Bounderby's factory. Ultimately Stephen's innocence is established, while Tom confesses his guilt

Sissy's inability to imbibe utilitarian ideas. Sissy is the daughter of the circus-clown who deserts her and runs away. The clown had lost his ability to amuse the audiences and, thinking his daughter to be safe at Gradgrind's school, he foresakes her and absconds. Gradgrind takes Sissy under his protection. Like a character in a morality play, Sissy illustrates ideas which are diametrically opposed to the utilitarian philosophy taught at Gradgrind's school, a philosophy which she simply cannot imbibe. She plays a part in Louisa's story by prevailing upon Harthouse to quit Coketown just when Louisa might yet have eloped with that man. Sissy also helps Tom to escape when he is about to be arrested for the robbery at the bank.

Bounderby, the centre of the second division of the action. The second division of the action centres about Bounderby, a hard-hearted and vicious banker and manufacturer. Bounderby is part of the husband-wife-lover triangle, but he also has

a place in the sub-plot based upon his relationship with his housekeeper, Mrs. Sparsit. This lady has an aristocratic background though she is now destitute and therefore working as a housekeeper to a rich businessman. She harbours a secret desire and hope that Bounderby might one day marry her and, when this hope is frustrated by Bounderby's marrying Louisa, Mrs. Sparsit begins to burn with a feeling of jealousy of the young wife whom she regards as an intruder. Bounderby also has a mother he is ashamed of, and there is a minor episode which shows her visiting Coketown on occasions just to catch a glimpse of her son from a distance. Bounderby thus illustrates false pride as well as a lack of filial affection. (His false pride is seen in his having a housekeeper with an aristocratic background and thinking that she brings social distinction to his home). He is exposed subsequently as having fabricated much of the story he has been telling about his early life.

Stephen and Rachel centre of the third division of the action. The third division of the novel's action pertains to Stephen Blackpool, a worker in Bounderby's textile mill. Stephen's conjugal life has been rendered intolerable to him by a drunken wife. He now loves another woman, Rachel, and would like to divorce his wife but, finding it impossible to do so, he lives in a state of frustration, with Rachel providing whatever comfort she can. As Stephen is used by Tom in his scheme to shift responsibility for the theft at the bank, Stephen is connected with the Gradgrind story. He refuses to join the workers' union, suffering ostracism for this, but he vigorously defends his fellow-workers when questioned by Bounderby about the affairs of the union and is dismissed by his employer. Eventually he dies in an accident, but is able to exonerate himself from the charge of robbery at the bank before he dies.

Several themes in the novel. These three plot-sequences illustrate Dickens's general plan for revolving his action around his thesis. The thesis is wider than the attack on utilitarian economy, since it also includes criticism of the educational system, the caste system (or class distinctions), and divorce laws. The educational system is condemned through Gradgrind's emphasis on facts and through the sketch of the new schoolmaster. The caste system find satiric emphasis through the story of Mrs Sparsit whose ambition and position in the social scheme are at variance. James Harthouse shows the decay which results from rank without character. The criticism of divorce laws is apparent in Stephen's misery in his inability to get rid of his drunken wife.

Some other features of the structure. The plot-sequences in this novel are neither very complex nor fully developed. However, there is a reasonable amount of motivation in Louisa's attraction for Harthouse, and there is careful preparation for Tom's

theft. Gradgrind is shown as a man with a heart beneath his philosophy, for he takes Sissy under his protection, and he realizes the blunder of his philosophy after his children experience unhappiness or ruin because of his utilitarian system of education. There is mystery and suspense in the circumstances of Tom's theft, and there is sensation in Stephen's death in the mine pit.

III

Ironic titles of the three divisions of the novel. The three divisions of the novel have been given certain ironic titles by Dickens. Book I is called "Sowing" ; Book II is called "Reaping". and Book III is given the title "Garnering". At first sight, these titles may seem to be merely specimens of conventional wit in which the pleasant appearance of seeding and harvesting with all their gay and joyful associations of hope and fulfilment are contrasted with the cruel reality of the fate of Gradgrind. But there is more to it than that. The very choice of a natural image, itself the arche-type of growth and fruition, is contrasted with the harsh waste-land which Gradgrind makes of his family life and which his philosophy makes of Coketown. Moreover, the industrial period of the novel is thus set within the wider context of man's history which has largely been an agricultural one. The complacent view of Gradgrind is set against a cosmic vision of man, a vision which is also realised in the ironical idea of Time the Manufacturer who will have the last word on the products of the Gradgrind educational factory. The irony here does not simply play wittily on the surface of the novel. It is at one with the theme ; it is the theme in a nutshell. Similarly the title "The One Thing Needful" of Chapter 1 of Book I and the title "Another Thing Needful" of Chapter 1 of Book III, are not cases of verbal play alone. The careful symmetry in the placing betrays a piece of architecture, a building outwards from the very structure of the novel which leads the attention inwards again to an awareness of that structure.

The pattern of structural irony : a subtle example of it. The pattern of structural irony occurs very frequently in Dickens's novels. One subtle and complex example is to be found in the passage which describes Gradgrind returning home and catching his "metallurgical Louisa" and his "mathematical Tom" peeping through a hole of the circus-tent. Gradgrind has just mentally dismissed the circus as a triviality. This rejection of the imaginative and affective side of human nature sets in motion against him the machinery of the natural law. The catastrophe that follows is of the kind recommended by Aristotle. This catastrophe consists in Gradgrind's discovering his two children taking an inquisitive interest in the circus. The catastrophe contains both a discovery and a peripety and possesses the proper qualities of surprise and probability. Surprise is not only registered through

something that Gradgrind could hardly have believed ; but the specific reference to "his own metallurgical Louisa" and "his own mathematical Tom" brings out all the irony in the neat reversal of Gradgrind's expectations as a father and educationist. Yet the probability of the incident has been carefully prepared : earlier in the chapter, the education of the children of Gradgrind has been described in an ironic tone which leads to the hint : "Everything that heart could desire. Everything ? Well, I suppose so.". The passage, however, is more subtle than this. The basic movement of the novel originates in the spiritual blindness of Gradgrind, which is the blindness of a whole philosophy, of a whole society, of a whole era. Again, the spiritual short-sightedness of Gradgrind is suggested by the eye-glass which Gradgrind takes out of his pocket in order to look for any child he knows by name so that he may snub him and order him to move away from the circus. This physical action in his taking out his eye-glass expresses and emphasises the wider spiritual message. Furthermore, the incident is related organically to the rest of the novel both in form and in content. It foreshadows the major double catastrophe in which Louisa and Tom show so alarmingly the unexpected and inevitable effects of Gradgrind's system of education on their adult lives. The incident is, in fact, the major catastrophe of the novel in miniature. It is more. Since the incident provides an ominous warning which Gradgrind is to ignore at his peril, it is the act of wilful defiance which will trigger off that major catastrophe. Thus the incident is a tiny model of the whole ironic structure of the novel. As such it is vision as well as structure—a prophetic picture of the way in which an outraged natural law brings about a nemesis in the fullness of time.

IV

Free from too many sub-plots, too much melodrama, and a shifting focus. *Hard Times* is a masterpiece in its own way. The author's grasp here is sure, his direction unchanging, his insight keen and emphatic, his human sympathies warm and vital, and employed determinedly in the service of goodness and practical Christianity. The author's need to keep to a tight schedule in writing this novel and the limited amount of space somehow made for artistic and human sharpness of vision. The economy of expression in this novel was essential, and the result is deft and immediate, whether the subject is Coketown machinery, the Bounderby mansion, or Stephen's room. The author makes us contemplate the grotesque in Bounderby, the evil-vicious in Mrs. Sparsit, and the negation of humanity in Bitzer. The directness of the narrative is startling and yet the characters are as credible as the characters, more fully treated, in Dickens's other novels. *Hard Times* is free also from too many sub-plots, too much melodrama, and a shifting focus which bewilders rather than enlightens. It is also free from blemishes or solecisms against truth,

if we do not mind the sentimental excess which leads Sissy to take Louisa to her heart, and if we overlook also some of the utterances of Stephen. The theme of the novel is clear ; and the message behind the story is direct and humane, namely that the ways of the heart are more important than the ways of the mind. The precious need to extract from life the essence of goodness in the service of others is given the foremost place in this novel ; and the systems of fact and factory, which stand against the development of Christian feeling in the individual, are exposed and demolished. It must be admitted that Dickens did not understand trade-unionism ; nor did he suggest positive reform. But what Dickens did do was to confront the society of his time with the truth about itself. That truth is just as valid today as it was then. *Hard Times* is thus a humane plea for all times ; and this, combined with its artistic integrity, makes it one of the great novels of the nineteenth century.

14

Dickens's Real Purpose in "Hard Times"

Dickens's main intention. The strength of *Hard Times*, says a critic*, lies in its being a moral fable—that is, a fictional story with a clear intellectual purpose. Dickens's main intention was to comment on certain basic features of Victorian civilization. He was concerned about the difference between Fact and Fancy. The purpose of the novel was to emphasize, with all his power and skill, that this difference was not just a rhetorical antithesis. He meant to demonstrate that mere fact, or logic, leaves half of our lives out of account; that any method of ruling conduct or affairs, which lacks sympathy,l ove, and understanding between human beings, is in the end not merely sterile but bitterly destructive of all the moral virtues and beauty; that the proper education of children must take into account their moral development which it should foster through their fancy and love of life. The government of a country cannot safely be left to be administered from self-interest, nor trusted to a single class which is certain to look after itself first and last. The relations between capital and labour, or between masters and men, can never be properly managed or understood if they live in a state of perpetual conflict. Above all, Dickens shows that the relations between men and women; between father and children, mother and child, or brother and sister; between friends or any persons in almost any permanent association, must originate and be rooted in liking, affection, or love.

The broad purpose of the novel. The novel was thus a protest not merely against certain characteristics of *Victorian* society but against certain tendencies to be found in any industrial civilization. It was a protest against all repression of the human spirit, whether the repression is due to class-room teaching, the Constitution, the laws, or the principles of political economy. Dickens's purpose was not just to attack mid-nineteenth century utilitarianism. It was aimed at all kinds of social abuses which in his opinion were opposed to human life and happiness because they

*K.J. Fielding in his book, *Charles Dickens*.

took into account the supposed "facts" and ignored obvious human needs. That is why even the saw dust ring of the circus was preferable to the cinders of Coketown or the dust and ashes of the political arena.

Structural unity. Only by recognizing this broad purpose of the novel can we understand how it unifies Dickens's remarks on Stephen Blackpool's marriage, the aesthetic theories of the "third gentleman" in the second chapter, the problems of Trade Unionism, Louisa's marriage to Bounderby, and her brother's theft at the Bank. Dickens succeeded in giving his ideas in the book a unified purpose. *Hard Times* has coherence and power which deserve high praise even though it is not as entertaining as most of the other novels.

Dickens's dislike of extremists on both sides. However, the purpose of this novel has often been misunderstood. As it is partly about the conflict between a factory-owner and his workmen, it has been thought that Dickens wrote it in order to take sides. And, because both the factory owner (Bounderby) and the trade union leader (Slackbridge) have been depicted as worthless persons, Dickens has been claimed by some as a kind of socialist and greeted by others as faithful to capitalism. The fact, however, is that Dickens disliked extremists on both sides. He believed that the right to go on strike should exist but that this right should be used as little as possible. He hated employers like Bounderby, and he distrusted trade union agitators like Slackbridge. He believed in fostering pleasant industrial relations and wanted that a better understanding between the two sides should be brought about.

Attitude to machinery. Dickens was neither an apologist for, nor a critic of, industrial capitalism. Nor yet should he be regarded as a minor prophet in the line of Ruskin and William Morris. Although G.B. Shaw wrote, in an introduction to this novel, that "Dickens's occasional indignation spread and deepened into a passionate revolt against the whole industrial order of the modern world," this is surely wrong if we take it to mean that Dickens protested against the arrival of the machine and that he foresaw where the machine would lead. Dickens is essentially varied and paradoxical. Ruskin thus summed him up in a letter after Dickens's death : "He was a pure modernist — a leader of the steam-whistle party *par excellence*. His hero is essentially the iron master".

The weakness in the story of Stephen. The story of Stephen Blackpool, the weaver who is sent to Coventry for his refusal to join his union, is well enough in sentiment, but false in fact, false to the context of the novel, and false in character. It arises from Dickens's confusion of two different communities. The whole novel, in fact, tends to be weakest just where it might have come out strongest—as a study of industrial capitalism.

The wrong approach to the novel. It is possible to attach too much importance to the industrial scenes in the novel in comparison with the domestic life of the Gradgrind family and Mr. Sleary's circus. Unfortunately Dickens himself was responsible for calling attention to the industrial scenes, when he began to write. He chose as part of his theme a dispute in the cotton industry when the Preston* strike was in everybody's mind. He is said even to have visited Preston to study the strike. His subsequent denial that there was any necessary connection between Coketown and Preston made no difference therefore. In fact readers began to think that the novel was aimed at showing that if a child were brought up in a circus it would grow into a model of virtue and that if it were sent to a model school it might grow up to rob a bank or make a prostituted marriage. Such misunderstandings were a result of reading the stories with nothing but topical events in mind. Modern critics, who still treat the novel as an expression of Dickens's violent hostility to industrial capitalism and its entire scheme of life, are still more misleading. It is abundantly clear, in many ways, that Dickens was genuinely more sympathetic to workers (even when on strike) than most men of his class in his time or ours. Yet he was not interested in condemning capitalism.

Christian morality as the basis of the nevel. A serious study of such issues was not at the heart of Dickens's examination of society, superficially topical as he made it in *Hard Times*. Dickens used topicality as a means of "communicating"—it never gives his true subjects. By using public issues he helped both to awaken his creative force and to hold his readers' attention. He used events, which men knew of, to help him to speak to them more directly, and then he tried to write simple truths about their relations with one another. *Hard Times for These Times*** should surely be interpreted as a moral fable in the everyday sense. It may even be called a "morality drama" which another critic*** calls it. It is based on Christian morality. In many ways even, the story is to be read less as a fable than as a parable, or a tract for the times. Of course Dickens was attacking society, but not in company with Karl Marx in order to arouse revolution, but in the hope that all would act with greater Christian humility and charity.

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* Preston, an industrial town in northern England. A workers' strike was going on there at the time Dickens started writing this novel.

** This is the full title of the novel.

***Edgar Johnson.

15

"Hard Times" : A Flawed Classic

Various issues linked in the novel. In *Hard Times* Dickens links up several issues which are apparently unrelated. These include : the terrible ugliness of industrial development ; the theory of utilitarianism ; shallow self-interest ; the anti-social force of the capitalist ; and trade unionism. While the ugliness of industrialism is embodied in descriptions of Coketown, the other issues are symbolized in the characters of Gradgrind, Harthouse Bounderby, and Slackbridge respectively.

Industrial ugliness. Coketown is a town of red brick and black soot ; it is full of streets and lanes which are monotonously similar ; it has buildings of the same kind, so that there is hardly any difference between the jail and the hospital, and between the hospital and the town hall. On a hot day Coketown is hell !

Gradgrind and utilitarianism. The character of Gradgrind links the town with utilitarianism, a philosophy based upon Jeremy Bentham's dictum that social legislation should aim at the greatest happiness of the greatest number. This philosophy takes a mechanistic view of human nature. What the utilitarians like Jeremy Bentham, and his disciplies like Gradgrind in this novel, ignore is imagination and the emotions, poetry and sensibility, fancy and the instincts. Gradgrind is a materialist who attaches the greatest importance to the kind of facts which are represented by Bitzer's definition of a horse, and who attaches no value to the kind of knowledge that Sissy has about horses. Sissy in Gradgrind's eyes is Girl Number Twenty, hardly a human being.

Tom's theft. The stunting of the imagination and the emotions brought about by Gradgrind's system of education is seen in the lives of his children. His daughter has no outlet for her emotional life but her brother. Her brother, in his turn, finds consolation in compulsive gambling. He robs his employer to pay his debts and puts the blame on an honest working-man. When the theft is found to be his work, he tells his father that he was

governed by the system : "So many people are employed in position of trust : so many people, out of so many, will be dishonest".

Bitzer's lack of gratitude. So individual responsibility is diminished in favour of conformity to abstract rules of statistics, and human choice is limited under the bonds of mechanical determinism. The Gradgrind system would claim to judge human behaviour rationally and to hold in check the force of emotion. But the Gradgrind system fails because every utilitarian ultimately faces some situation in his own family when feelings assert themselves. Gradgrind finds himself in such a situation when Bitzer catches hold of Tom as the culprit who robbed the bank. To Gradgrind's utter dismay, Bitzer shows himself to be utterly devoid of any sentiment of gratitude towards the founder of the school where Bitzer was educated.

The failure of Louisa's marriage. A much greater failure is seen in the case of Gradgrind's daughter's marriage. Gradgrind saw no reason why his daughter should not marry his friend and Tom's employer, Bounderby. In economic terms it was a very good match. Louisa's lack of feeling for Bounderby was no argument against this match. But the match, so rationally conceived, fails disastrously. Louisa returns to her father's house, and all Gradgrind can say is that he meant to do right.

Harthouse and self-interest. James Harthouse, like Gradgrind, is committed to the doctrine of self-interest. It is Gradgrind, in fact, who brings Harthouse to Coketown, and there is nothing unconvincing about their association in theory. But, in practice, Dickens shows us little of their collaboration. The emphasis is placed on Harthouse's function as an instrument of the plot rather than the theme : Harthouse is seen primarily as Louisa's potential seducer. However, in this role he is easily disposed of by Sissy in terms that would have done credit to a Lord Chief Justice. We hardly feel that a character so flimsy as Harthouse was essentially part of the structure of the book.

Bounderby, the capitalist. Bounderby, banker, manufacturer, capitalist, knows none of the human ties of affection or compassion. In his effort to represent himself as a truly self-made man, he has cut himself off from all personal relationships : all that he recognizes as a connection between himself and others is conceived in terms of power. He has pensioned his mother off on condition that she never comes to see him ; he discards his wife when she asserts herself beyond the role of a mere article of possession ; he dismisses one of his workmen arbitrarily even though he knows that this may bring about the man's starvation.

Utilitarianism in practice. The psychological portrait works very well within the moral framework of Dickens's fable.

Bounderby is at once individual capitalist, and capitalism itself personified. He is utilitarianism in practice. Acting wholly out of self-interest, which for him is not acquisition of money alone but of power, he is able to represent such self-interest in terms of Bentham's "greatest happiness" principle. Speaking to Harthouse, he praises the smoke of Coketown factory-chimneys as "the healthiest thing in the world in all respects" and thus describes the kind of work his labour-force has to do : "It's the pleasantest work there is, and it's the lightest work there is, and it's the best paid work there is. More than that, we couldn't improve the mills themselves, unless we laid down Turkey carpets on the floors, which we're not going to do."

The aristocratic housekeeper. By a stroke of genius, Dickens provides Bounderby with an aristocratic housekeeper. Bounderby represents the ruling class, the bourgeoisie, of the present; she represents the ruling class, the aristocracy, of the past. Between them they act out this moral fable.

The unsatisfactory portrayal of Stephen Blackpool. Stephen does not come alive as a *working man* ; he is rather a martyr, and one whose martyrdom is a personal rather than social matter. It is significant that never once in this industrial novel does Dickens show us the day-to-day life of men in a factory. Stephen is not, in fact, dramatized as a typical working man so much as a personification of a victim ; not a social victim either, but the victim of a broken-down marriage. His contrast with Bounderby is not that between master and man; it is rather that between a husband rich enough to free himself of his wife and one too poor to do any such thing. Stephen's story is too biased agains' him to be representative ; it cannot therefore be taken as an expression of the theme. It is not his case as victim of society we have to consider, but the sentimental tale of a workman and his wife. It is odd, too, that his wife should turn from a bonny girl to an alcoholic bitch, and we would be justified in asking how this came about. The novel itself affords no clue.

The misrepresentation of the trade unions. The portrayal of Slackbridge too is unsatisfactory. Nobody ever addressed a workers' meeting as Slackbridge does : his mode of speech does not even symbolize anything. Dickens has misrepresented the nature of trade unions and their leaders. On a naturalistic level, on a political level, on historical, on fictive and stylistic levels, Dickens's picture is a complete failure.

The people of the circus. The people of the circus seem to offer the only positive element in this novel. "People must be amused. You must have us, Squire. Do the wise thing, and the kind thing too, and make the best of us, not the worst" says Mr. Sleary to Gradgrind in his lisping manner. It is a pity that Dickens

was not able to show us the virtues of the circus people in their day-to-day work. We would require something more substantial than the glimpses of the circus people we have been given, to stand against the menace of utilitarianism and its extensions into politics and industry. As it is, nothing in the novel is capable of countering the unholy alliance of Gradgrind and Bounderby. For this reason the book seems grimmer than is strictly necessary for the subject. The book's structure too has been somewhat distorted by the misrepresentation of the trade unions and the exaltation of a circus troupe to the position of a moral positive.

A flawed classic. And yet, in spite of these inadequacies, *Hard Times* is a novel of great merit. "It is the most flawed of Dickens's classics, possibly, but it is still a classic". Here Dickens attacks not industry, but rather laissez faire which polluted the industrial climate. Not industry alone is in question, but the philosophy operating behind it. The novel condemns the "system" by which the claims of individual human beings are trampled in a general confusion.

16

F.R. Leavis on "Hard Times"

Leavis's admiration for this novel on artistic grounds. F.R. Leavis's critique of *Hard Times* has become famous because it revolutionised the general critical attitude towards this novel. *Hard Times* has never been a very popular novel and it had never in the past been regarded as a great work except by such persons as Ruskin and Shaw who admired it on ideological grounds. Leavis, however, admires this book chiefly on artistic grounds, although he also fully recognises the social value of the book with its exposure of the falseness of the utilitarian attitude to life that characterised the Victorian age.

A compact work, original and triumphantly successful. Leavis calls *Hard Times* a masterpiece, a work that has the distinctive strength that make Dickens a major artist. According to Leavis, it is a compact work, with a concentrated significance which is immediately clear and penetrating ; it is a completely serious work of art and, in its originality, triumphantly successful. Leavis also describes this novel as a moral fable.

The inhumanities of Victorian civilization ; utilitarianism. Dickens's creative exuberance is here controlled by a profound inspiration that informs, directs, and limits this book. The inspiras tion is what is given in the grim clinch of the title, *Hard Times.* In this work, Dickens is possessed by a comprehensive vision. It is a vision in which the inhumanities of Victorian civilisation are seen as nourished and sanctioned by a hard philosophy, the aggressive formulation of an inhuman spirit. The philosophy is represented by Thomas Gradgrind, who had brought up his children on the lines of the experiment regarded by John Stuart Mill as one which was carried out in his own case. What Gradgrind stands for is respectable though repellent. His utilitarianism is a theory held by him sincerely, and he shows an intellectual disinterestedness in applying it to the pupils in his school. But Gradgrind marries his eldest daughter to Josiah Bounderby, "banker, merchant. manufacturer", about whom there is no disinterestedness whatever, and nothing to be respected. Bounderby stands for Victorian "rugged individua-

lism" in its grossest and most inflexible form. He is concerned with nothing but self-assertion, power, and material success ; he has no interest in ideas or ideals—except the idea of being the completely self-made man. Dickens, in portraying Bounderby, makes a just observation about the affinities and practical tendency of utilitarianism as, in his presentation of the Gradgrind school and the Gradgrind home, he does about the utilitarian spirit in Victorian education.

The opening scene : the distinction between Sissy and Bitzer. The opening scene in Gradgrind's school is replete with significance. Girl Number Twenty has been brought up among people whose livelihood depends upon understanding horses, but Gradgrind says that knowledge of that kind is not required in his school because such knowledge is not real knowledge. Bitzer is the model pupil who, on being asked to define a horse, promptly delivers the definition : "Quadruped, graminivorous, forty teeth, namely twenty-four grinders, four eye-teeth, and twelve incisive" ; etc. etc. This definition is fully acceptable to Gradgrind and, accordingly, he says : "Now, girl number twenty, you know what a horse is." The irony here is pungent ; subsequently this irony is further developed in Bitzer's career. Sissy's incapacity to acquire facts and formulas of this kind, and her inaptitude for this kind of education, is revealed to us not only in this episode but throughout her subsequent career. Sissy is essentially human ; and her humanity makes it impossible for her to understand an ethos according to which she is addressed as "girl number twenty" ; she cannot think of any human being as a unit for arithmetic.

Sissy, the antithesis of calculating self-interest. Sissy represents vitality as well as goodness ; in fact, these two qualities are here seen as one. Sissy represents the generous, impulsive life, finding self-fulfilment in forgetfulness of self. She is the antithesis of calculating self-interest. In her case, life is lived freely and richly from the deep instinctive and emotional springs ; she is entirely different from Bitzer, the thin-blooded, quasi-mechanical product of Gradgrindery. Sissy's symbolic significance is bound up with that of Mr. Sleary's horse-riding where human kindness is always associated with vitality.

The symbolic significance of the circus. The circus people represent not only human spontaneity but also highly developed skill and deftness of the kind that brings poise and confident ease. Their skills have no value for the utilitarian calculus. They express vital human inpulses and they serve vital human needs. When Gradgrind walks from his utilitarian school towards his utiliarian abode (named "Stone Lodge"), he catches his own young "metallurgical Louisa" and his own "mathematical Thomas" peeping through a tent-hole to look at the circus and is deeply disappointed by their deviation from the code of conduct which he has prescribed for them and which he expects them to obey. Grad-

grind frowns upon the circus as frivolous and wasteful, while Bounderby has nothing but scorn for the circus which, in fact, brings to the workers of Coketown what they are badly in need of. The circus brings to them not merely amusement but art ; it brings to them the spectacle of triumphant activity which, in its easy mastery, is joyously self-justified. In fact, by investing a travelling circus with this kind of symbolic value Dickens expresses a profounder reaction to industrialism than might have been expected of him. Dickens's criticism of utilitarianism and industrialism becomes much more effective and vivid because of the contrasted portrayal of the circus and its people.

Sissy's strength and her victory over Harthouse. Sissy Jupe shares in the strength of the horse-riding. She is wholly convincing in the function which Dickens assigns to her. The working of her influence in the utilitarian home is conveyed with a fine tact, and we do really feel her as a growing potency. Dickens can even provide her with a spirit for a victorious conversation with James Harthouse, in which she tells him that he must quit Coketown without delay and stop bothering Louisa with his attentions. She is not afraid of him, and she is in no way disconcerted by his status. The victory of disinterestedness is convincing enough as we read through this scene.

Bounderby a Jonsonian character ; not so Gradgrind. Bounderby turns out to be consistently a Jonsonian character in the sense that he is incapable of change. He remains the blustering egotist and braggart, and reacts to the collapse of his marriage in a manner which we could anticipate. But Gradgrind is capable of change ; he has to experience the confutation of his philosophy in order to be convinced that he was wrong ; it is life which proves the wrongness of the philosophy.

The wonderful scene between father and daughter, a triumph of ironic art. The confutation of the utilitarian philosophy by the truth of experience in life is presented by Dickens with great subtlety. Gradgrind's initial kindness towards Sissy shows that the conditions for this confutation already exist in this man. Gradgrind, we are told, though hard enough, was by no means so rough a man as Bounderby. The inadequacy of the calculus is starkly exposed when Gradgrind brings it to bear on the problem of marriage in the wonderful scene with his eldest daughter. The perfect rationality with which she receives his proposal is indeed embarrassing to him. The whole scene is a triumph of ironic art. No logical analysis could have disposed of the philosophy of fact and calculations with such neat finality as has been done through this dialogue between father and daughter. The issues are reduced to algebraic formulations; Gradgrind, with his rationality in which there is no room for instinct, is unable to understand that his daughter is a living human being.

The development of Louisa and Tom, psychologically convincing. The psychology of Louisa's development and of her brother Tom is sound. Having no outlet for her emotional life except in her love for her brother, she lives for him, and she marries Bounderby for Tom's sake. Thus, as a result the restrictions and starvations of the Gradgrind system, natural affection and capacity for disinterested devotion are turned to evil purposes. As for Tom, the system has made of him a bored and sullen whelp ; he has become a triumph of calculation ; this is what the utilitarian philosophy has done for him. His descent into debt and bank-robbery is natural. And it is natural that Louisa, having sacrificed herself for this ungrateful object of her affection, should be found somewhat responsive to the advances of James Harthouse who has understood the situation and who seeks to utilise the opportunity for his own purpose. Harthouse's defence of his genteel cynicism is a shrewd attack on the Gradgrind philosophy. Says he :

"The only difference between us and the professors of virtue or benevolence or philanthropy—never mind the name—is that we know it is all meaningless and say so ; while they know it equally, and will never say so".

Gradgrind's "system" confuted. When Louisa seeks an escape from Harthouse by returning to her father she tells him ; "All I know is, your philosophy and your teaching will not save me." She then sinks to the ground, and her father sees "the pride of his heart and the triumph of his system lying, an insensible heap, at his feet." Gradgrind now realises the depth of his love for his child ; he now knows that his love for her is more important than his system ; and it is thus that his system is confuted. There is nothing sentimental here. The demonstration is impressive, because we are convinced of the genuineness of Gradgrind's love, and because Gradgrind has been made to exist for us as a man "who meant to do right."

Dickens's art, that of a poetic dramatist. Another demonstration, the other "triumph" of Gradgrind's system, is yet to come. Of that demonstration, Tom is the centre. That demonstration is sardonic comedy, imagined with great intensity and done with the sure touch of genius. This is the pregnant scene in which Gradgrind recognises his son who is disguised as a comic negro servant in Sleary's circus ; he recognises also the fact that his son owes his escape from the law to a peculiarly disinterested gratitude —to the opportunity given to him to assume such a disguise by the non-utilitarian Sleary who is grateful to Gradgrind for having looked after Sissy so well. This particular scene illustrates also the rich complexity of Dickens's art. The scene by itself justifies the view that *Hard Times* is a poetic work. It suggests that the genius of Dickens may fairly be described as that of a poetic dramatist. No simple formula can take account of the various elements in the whole effect produced by this scene, a sardonic-tragic scene in which

satire mingles with pathos. We here have that concentration and flexibility in the interpretation of life which are associated with Shakespearean drama. The note of ironic-satiric discomfiture of the utilitarian philosopher by the rebound of his theories upon himself is further developed in the scene with Bitzer, the truly exceptional pupil who is the real triumph of the system.

High-fantastic comedy, and the solemn moral. Tom's escape is managed, successfully in every sense, by means which show Dickens's capacity for high-fantastic comedy. And then there follows the solemn moral of the whole fable, put with the rightness of genius into Mr. Sleary's mouth when he says that there is a love in the world, not all self-interest after all but something very different, and that this love has a way of its own of calculating or not calculating.

The flaw in the trade union scenes. In dealing with trade unions, Dickens betrays a marked limitation. There were undoubtedly professional agitators, and trade union solidarity was undoubtedly often asserted at the cost of the rights of the individual; but there is definitely a flaw in Dickens giving a representative role to the agitator, Slackbridge, and making trade unionism an agent in the victimisation of the good working-man.

Unfair attack on parliament. Dickens also betrays a lack of political understanding when he describes the British Parliament as merely the "national dust-yard", where the "national dustmen" entertain one another "with a great many noisy little fights among themselves," and appoint commissions which specialise in collecting dreary facts and futile statistics.

A trio suggestive of snobbery. Yet Dickens's understanding of Victorian civilisation is adequate for his purpose ; and the justice and penetration of his criticism of this civilisation cannot be doubted. His moral perception too works in close co-operation with a clear insight into the English social structure. James Harthouse is necessary for the plot, but he has a representative function also. He comes to Coketown as a future parliamentary candidate, because "Gradgrind's party wanted assistance in cutting the throats of the Graces," and they "liked fine gentlemen ; they pretended that they did not, but they did." And so the alliance between the old ruling class and the "hard fact men"' figures duly in the fable. There is Mrs. Sparsit, for instance, who might seem to be there merely for the plot. But her husband was a Powler, a fact which she mentions as often as Bounderby refers to the myth of his birth in a ditch. The three of them—Bounderby, Mrs. Sparsit, and Harthouse—form a trio which suggests the whole system of British snobbery.

17

"Hard Times" : Critical Summary

BOOK THE FIRST : "SOWING"

CHAPTER I : THE ONE THING NEEDFUL

Emphasis on "facts". The scene is a school-room. In addition to a class of children, boys and girls, there are three grown-up and mature persons present, one of these three being the speaker of the words with which the story opens, the second being the schoolmaster who is being addressed in the presence of the class, and the third a government official. The speaker is stating the basic principle of his concept of education. He puts all the emphasis that he can upon "facts". He wants the schoolmaster to teach nothing but "facts" to these boys and girls. "Facts" alone are wanted in life, he says. The minds of human beings should be formed upon "facts", he asserts. "In this life, we want nothing but facts, sir ; nothing but facts," he says to the schoolmaster emphatically.

Critical comments

Satirical humour. This very short opening chapter of the novel introduces us to the philosophy of education of one of the leading characters whose name is Thomas Gradgrind though this name is given to us not here but at the beginning of the next chapter. This man puts all the emphasis that he is capable of on "facts". By the exaggerated emphasis that is being placed on facts, we can at once judge that the author is satirising Gradgrind's view of education and his glorification of facts. The satirical intention becomes even more clear from the manner in which the author describes the speaker and his way of speaking. Gradgrind's square forefinger emphasises his observations with a line on the schoolmaster's sleeve every time he completes a sentence. The emphasis is helped by the speaker's mouth which is wide, thin, and hard-set ; the emphasis is helped by the speaker's voice which is inflexible and dictatorial ; the emphasis is helped by the few hairs which the speaker has on his bald head.

The speaker's amusing physical features. The physical features of the speaker also show the mocking attitude of the author. Gradgrind has a square wall of a forehead, with his eyebrows for its base, while his eyes find spacious cellarage in two dark caves. In short, the whole of the first brief chapter is written in a satirical, and therefore amusing, tone. Both the physical appearance and his cast of mind are thus being ridiculed.

Children compared to small vessels. There is also a touch of satirical humour in the last sentence in which the school-children are compared to small vessels arranged in order, ready to have gallons and gallons of facts pured into them, until they are full to the brim.

CHAPTER II : MURDERING THE INNOCENTS

A man of facts and calculations. Thomas Gradgrind is described as a man of realities, a man of facts and calculations, a man whose thinking is based on the principle that two and two make four and nothing more. Even human beings are for him arithmetical figures. He looks upon the boys and girls in the class-room as "pitchers" who are to be filled with facts.

Cecilia, not Sissy. Addressing one of the students in the class-room as "girl number twenty," Gradgrind asks who she is because he has never seen her before. Girl number twenty replies that she is Sissy Jupe. Gradgrind points out that "Sissy" is no name and that she should call herself "Cecilia." When the girl says that her father calls her Sissy, Gradgrind sharply retorts that her father has no business to do so and that she should tell her father to call her Cecilia.

The definition of a horse. Gradgrind then asks this girl to define a horse. The girl, already feeling confused by Gradgrind's making a distinction between Sissy and Cecilia, is unable to supply a definition. Gradgrind then turns to a boy called Bitzer and asks him to offer a definition of a horse. Bitzer gives the kind of definition which Gradgrind approves of. Bitzer says that a horse is an animal which has four legs, which eats grass, which has forty teeth including twentyfour grinders, which sheds its coat in the spring, which has hard hoofs yet requiring to be shod with iron, and the age of which is judged by certain marks in its mouth.

About wall-paper and carpets. At this stage, the third gentleman in the class-room steps forth. He is a government officer who has come to inspect the school. Bitzer's definition of a horse is fully acceptable to this officer also. He then himself asks the class a couple of questions. He asks whether they would paper a room with representations of horses, and whether they could cover the floor of a room with a carpet having a representation of flowers upon it. As

the class cannot give satisfactory answers, the officer explains that a room should not be papered with representations of horses because, factually speaking, horses are never seen walking up and down the walls of a room ; and that a carpet with a representation of flowers upon it should not be spread on the floor because, factually speaking, it is not right that flowers should be trampled upon by the feet of those who walk upon the floor. This officer expresses his firm opposition to anything like "fancy" because it is the "fact" which has a supreme importance. The officer then calls upon the schoolmaster to address the class and give his first lesson (because it appears that a new schoolmaster has been appointed).

The new schoolmaster's first lesson. The schoolmaster, whose name is Mr. McChoakumchild, then proceeds to give his first lesson to the class in accordance with the principles which have already been enunciated by Gradgrind and the government officer, and on which he himself had been fed.

Critical comments

Weighing and calculating human beings. Gradgrind's philosophy of education is further elaborated in this chapter. The satirical tone continues. The author makes fun of Gradgrind who, we are told, carries a rule, a pair of scales, and a multiplication table always in his pocket, and who is ever ready to weigh and measure human beings and to calculate what exactly a human being amounts to. It is amusing to read that he does not approve of the nickname "Sissy" by which Cecilia's father calls her. Gradgrind does not believe in pet names or in shortened names which are generally used in homes, because he is an ardent believer in "facts". The definition of a horse as given by Bitzer and as accepted by Gradgrind is also amusing because it is a catalogue of literal facts only.

Facts, not fancy. The government officer has the same attitude towards facts as Gradgrind. That is why the government officer has his objections to a representation of horses on wall-paper and a representation of flowers on a carpet. "You are never to fancy," he says to Cecilia Jupe, and Gradgrind repeats that injunction. "You are to be in all things regulated and governed by fact" says the government officer to the class. The new schoolmaster is exactly of the kind desired by Gradgrind and the government officer.

The schoolmaster satirized, like the other two. There is a satirical tone in the description of the schoolmaster, as there was in the description of Gradgrind and of the government officer. The author pokes fun at this schoolmaster's vast but superficial knowledge, and says : "If he had only learnt a little less, how infinitely better he might have taught much more." The aim of

all the three— Gradgrind, the government officer, and the schoolmaster—is the same, namely to crush the fancy or the imagination of children or at least to maim and distort this faculty in them.

CHAPTER III : A LOOPHOLE

Gradgrind's five children. The school, mentioned above, belonged to Gradgrind who had established it as a model institution to educate children, with facts as the governing principle of education. After having addressed the class and having introduced the new schoolmaster to the children, Gradgrind now walks homeward. Gradgrind has five children, and he complacently thinks that he is bringing them up in accordance with the best possible principles. This thought greatly pleases him. Gradgrind was originally a wholesale hardware merchant, but he is now retired from business and has built a home for himself and his family just outside Coketown. His house is called Stone Lodge. Gradgrind now harbours an ambition to become a member of Parliament.

Eminently practical. Gradgrind is walking homewards in a hopeful and satisfied frame of mind. He is an affectionate father, in his own way ; but he would like to describe himself as an eminently practical father. He feels a particular pride in the phrase "eminently practical" which he applies to himself. When Gradgrind reaches the neutral ground upon the outskirts of the town, he hears sounds of music, the clashing and banging of the band attached to the horse-riding establishment which has been temporarily set up there.

Gradgrind's two erring children. This horse-riding establishment is a kind of circus belonging to a man called Sleary. Gradgrind would have paid no attention at all to the trivialities of a circus had he not, to his utter surprise, found two of his children, Louisa and Thomas, in the company of a crowd of children, peeping through the circus tent in an effort to catch a glimpse of what is going on in the circus arena.

Gradgrind disappointed with the two children. Gradgrind, feeling shocked by the way in which he is being disgraced by his children, interrogates them and asks what they are doing here. Louisa replies to her father's questioning in a rather defiant manner. She says that she just wanted to see what the circus was like, and she admits to having brought Thomas with her. Louisa is a petty girl of fifteen or sixteen, while Thomas is younger than she. When her father says that he is sorry that she should behave in this manner, she expresses no regret but says that she has been feeling bored for a long time. Gradgrind thereupon says that her conduct has been most disappointing and that he does not know what Mr. Bounderby would say when he learns of this incident.

Critical comments

Satire on Gradgrind's method of educating children. The vein of satirical humour runs through the whole of this chapter. The target of satire here again is Gradgrind. Gradgrind, we are told, intended every child in his school to be a model child, and he feels inwardly very happy to reflect that all his five children are model children. Gradgrind has taken care to see that his children do not make use of their imagination and do not learn useless things. Accordingly, none of these five children has ever seen a face in the moon ; none of them has been allowed to learn the silly jingle : "Twinkle, twinkle, little star; How I wonder what you are ;" and none of these children has been allowed to listen to nursery stories with which most children are normally acquainted.

Gradgrind's house satirically described. Even the house that Gradgrind has built is described in a satirical manner. It is a "great square house, a calculated, balanced, and proved house, with six windows on this side of the door and six on that side, and a total of twelve in this wing and a total of twelve in the other wing"; and so on.

Gradgrind's reaction to his finding two of his children at the circus. Gradgrind is not in the least interested in the circus or its musical band. He is shocked and dismayed to find two of his children peeping through a tent-hole to see what is going on inside. Obviously Gradgrind's educational experiment is proving a failure. As Louisa says, she has been feeling tired for a long time. Her imagination has been starved and she has not been able to abide by her father's code of conduct. Gradgrind's chief anxiety now is what Mr. Bounderby would say. There is much humour in the concluding sentence of this chapter where we are told that Gradgrind repeats at intervals "What would Mr. Bounderby say ? —as if Mr. Bounderby had been Mrs. Grundy.*"

CHAPTER IV : MR. BOUNDERBY

"The bully of humility". Mr. Bounderby is a bosom friend of Gradgrind. He is a rich man—banker, merchant, manufacturer. He is a self-made man who never tires of proclaiming that he is self-made. He is "the bully of humility**".

Bounderby's life-story. It is Bounderby's birthday and he is paying a visit to Stone Lodge. Speaking to Mrs. Gradgrind, he tells her that he was born in a ditch, that he was

*Mrs Grundy, a character in Morton's play *Speed the Plough*, symbolizes conventional propriety or the opinion of one's neighbours and friends.

**"The bully of humility" is a phrase to describe a man who is not ashamed of his humble origin but who speaks about that humble origin in an aggressive, bullying manner. He makes a virtue of his humble birth and low parentage, and constantly boasts of it. The phrase is, of course, paradoxical and amusing.

abandoned by his mother when he was born, and that he was left in the charge of his grandmother who was a drunken woman. He goes on to say that subsequently he ran away from home and became a vagabond. Eventually he rose to his present position after having worked as an errand-boy, labourer, porter, clerk, chief manager, and small partner.

Children asked to be somethingological. At this stage, Gradgrind enters with the erring children whom he has caught red-handed, peering through a hole to see the circus. Mrs. Gradgrind scolds the children for having misbehaved and asks them to go and be "somethingological"*.

The decision to expel Sissy from school. Gradgrind and Bounderby now discuss the situation as regards the two children's unexpected conduct. The children's vulgar curiosity to take a look at the vagabonds in the circus has arisen, according to these two men, from their imagination. Gradgrind has always believed in developing the faculty of reason in the children and not allowing the imagination to develop at all. The two friends trace the development of the imaginative faculty in Louisa to her contact with Sissy Jupe at school, because Sissy Jupe is the daughter of a circus performer and because she could have been responsible for exciting Louisa's curiosity about the circus. It is decided by Gradgrind and Bounderby to expel Sissy Jupe from the school in the interests of other children.

The unwanted kiss. Before departing from Stone Lodge, Bounderby plants a kiss on Louisa's cheek but, when he has left, Louisa keeps rubbing her cheek for several minutes in an effort to wipe away the kiss.

Critical comments

Bounderby's character. This chapter throws a good deal of light on the past life of Bounderby and on his character. Bounderby is very proud of being a self-made man, and he has no inhibitions whatever in talking about his humble origin and his early life as a vagabond. He freely speaks about his past life, about his mother who deserted him, and about his grand-mother who was a drunkard.

The elements of humour and satire. We have plenty of humour in this chapter arising from the boastful manner in which Bounderby talks about his early life and arising also from the manner in which the character of Mrs. Gradgrind is depicted. Mrs. Gradgrind is described "as a little, thin, white, pink-eyed bundle of shawls, of surpassing feebleness, mental and bodily". She is

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* "somethingological" is a word coined as a parody of such words as geological, biological, and theological : "Something-ological." Mrs. Gradgrind has learnt certain phrases like a parrot and not knowing what exactly to say to the children exhorts them to be something which ends with "ological."

always taking some medicine or the other, but without any effect. She is so feeble that even when she smiles she does so weakly, and gives no other sign of vitality. Gradgrind himself continues to be the target of satire, with his "eminently practical mind" and his theory that education should aim only at developing the faculty of reason in children. There is an obvious touch of satire in Mrs. Gradgrind telling the two children to go and be "somethingological." The manner in which Louisa rubs her cheek in order to wipe away Bounderby's kiss is also amusing.

CHAPTER V : THE KEYNOTE

A town of machinery and smoke. Coketown is a town of machinery and tall chimneys, with interminable columns of smoke rising into the air. The town has many large streets all very like one another, and many small streets still more like one another ; and it is inhabited by people equally like one another. The population consists of people belonging to at least eighteen different religious sects. The town is completely dominated by facts ; facts, indeed, are sacred to this town.

Sissy encountered in a street. Gradgrind and Bounderby, the two "eminently practical gentlemen," are going towards the circus in order to meet Sissy's father and direct him to withdraw Sissy from the school. It so happens that they meet Sissy running through a street. Seeing the two gentlemen she stops and explains that she is being chased by Bitzer, who frightened her by making cruel faces at her. Just then Bitzer also arrives at the spot, breathless with running. His explanation is that he was only trying to explain to Sissy the definition of a horse.

The nine oils for a massage. Sissy is carrying a bottle which seems to Gradgrind to contain gin for Sissy's father. Sissy, however, explains that the bottle contains the nine oils with which her father massages himself whenever he receives any bruises in the course of his circus performances.

Taken to Sissy's lodging. She now escorts these two gentlemen to the locality called Pod's End where she and her father are lodging in a mean little public-house with other members of the circus troupe.

Critical comments

Satirical humour in the description of the town and its people. We have some more satirical humour in this chapter. The manner in which Coketown is described is quite amusing. This town, we are told, has no greater taint of fancy in it than Mrs. Gradgrind. Fact is the keynote of this town: "Fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the material aspect of the town: fact, fact, fact, everywhere

in the immaterial." The school is all fact, the relations between master and men are all fact, and everything is fact between the maternity hospital and the graveyard. We are also amused to read that all the public inscriptions in the town are painted alike so that the jail might have been the hospital, the hospital might have been the jail, and the town-hall might have been either. The people in this town are also described in a satirical manner.

The character of Gradgrind, and of Bounderby. It is characteristic of Gradgrind to think that the bottle in Sissy's hand contains gin for her father. Having a low opinion about the circus performers, he has the impression that every one of them must be a drunkard. However, we are told that Gradgrind, though hard enough by nature, is by no means as rough a man as Bounderby. Gradgrind's character is not unkind, all things considered. The only defect in him is his over-emphasis on reason and his completely refusing to acknowledge the value of the imaginative faculty in human beings. Bounderby holds the same ideas about the importance of reason and about the character of the circus-performers whom he regards as idlers.

CHAPTER VI : SLEARY'S HORSEMANSHIP

Sissy's father not at his lodgings. The name of the public-house is Pegasus's Arms. The two gentlemen follow Sissy up the stairs into the room where she and her father live. Sissy's father, Signor Jupe, is not in. Sissy leaves the two gentlemen in the room and goes away in search of her father who might have gone to the booth.

Sissy's father, Signor Jupe, absconding. After a few minutes, a young man enters the room, accompanied by a small fellow. The young man is Mr. E.W.B. Childers, a member of the circus troupe, known for his daring vaulting act as a wild huntsman, His companion is a diminutive boy with an old face. This boy assists Mr. Childers at his performances in the circus, and is quite cheeky or impudent. Mr. Childers explains to the two waiting gentlemen that Signor Jupe has lately not been performing his clown's part at the circus satisfactorily and that, in a state of utter disappointment and frustration, Signor Jupe has abandoned his daughter and absconded.

A gathering of the circus performers. By this time other members of the circus-troupe also appear on the scene—two or three good-looking young women among them, with their two or three husbands, and their two or three mothers, and their eight or nine little children who perform the parts of fairies whenever necessary. The owner of the circus, Mr. Sleary, also appears. They all know that Signor Jupe has run away, leaving his daughter behind. Mr. Sleary asks the two gentlemen whether they have come to do something for Sissy.

Sissy's distress. Sissy now returns, disappointed at not having been able to find her father. She is feeling very distressed at her father's disappearence. She can never believe that her father has foresaken her and run away. She insists that he has gone away to do something for her, to do some good to her.

Gradgrind's offer to take charge of Sissy. Gradgrind now tells Mr. Sleary that he had come to inform Sissy's father that Sissy could no longer be received at the school as a pupil and that he must make some other arrangement for her. Now, however, the situation has changed as a consequence of Sissy's father having run away. Gradgrind's proposal now is that he will take charge of Sissy and educate her and provide for her, the only condition being that she must terminate her relationship with the people of the circus and must not communicate with them ever again. Gradgrind's proposal is accepted by Sissy and by the entire circus troupe.

Bounderby opposed to Gradgrind's proposal. Bounderby is, however, opposed to Gradgrind's proposal. He suggests to Gradgrind that the latter should think over his proposal before actually putting it into effect and that, in the meantime, Sissy can stay with him at his house.

Sissy's good-bye to the circus. Sissy bids good-bye to the members of the circus troupe, all of whom express their good wishes to her. Sissy goes to Bounderby's house.

Critical comments

A new development in the plot and a new side to Gradgrind's character. There is an important development in the plot in this chapter. Signor Jupe's running away, leaving Sissy behind, comes as a surprise to everybody and, of course, as a shock to Sissy herself. Sissy is so deeply attached to her father that she cannot believe that he has deserted her. Gradgrind shows a human touch in his character when he offers to take charge of Sissy and to educate her at his own cost. Gradgrind had come to the lodgings of Sissy's father in order to get rid of Sissy, but the result of his visit is just the reverse of what he had decided to do.

The element of humour. This chapter gives us a detailed picture of the people of the circus, and especially of its owner, Mr. Sleary, and of two of its performers, Childers and the diminutive boy who is called Master Kidderminster. There is plenty of humour in the way these people are portrayed. Master Kidderminster, for example, amuses us greatly by his insolence towards Bounderby who tries to assert his importance. Also, when Bounderby says that his mother ran away after giving birth to him, Childers gives

the amusing reply that he is not at all astonished to hear this. When Bounderby says that Signor Jupe is a runaway rogue and a vagabond, and that this is exactly what Signor Jupe is in the English language, Childers replies : "It's all the same to me who he is or what he is not, whether in English or in French." And Childers goes on to give quite a snub to Bounderby just as Master Kidderminster has previously done. Subsequently when Childers is speaking to Gradgrind he speaks with a total obliviousness of the very existence of Bounderby. .

The element of pathos. Mixed with the humour in this chapter is the element of pathos also. Her father's desertion of Sissy and Sissy's distress are quite moving. The episode becomes even more touching in view of Sissy's complete confidence in her father and her childish certainty that her father can never foresake her. Sissy's taking leave of the other members of the troupe and their good-byes are all quite moving.

The portrayal of the circus people. The members of the circus troupe ave portrayed in a very favourable light. We are told that there was "a remarkable gentleness and childishness about these people, and an untiring readiness to help and pity one another." These people deserve as much respect as the everyday virtues of any class of people in the world. The Sleary philosophy is also perfectly wholesome though it is enunciated by Sleary in an amusing manner because of his lisp : "Make the betht of uth, not the wurtht" (i.e., "Make the best of us, not the worst*").

CHAPTER VII : MRS. SPARSIT

Bounderby's high opinion of his housekeeper, Mrs. Sparsit. Being a bachelor, Bounderby has a housekeeper to look after his household. This housekeeper is Mrs. Sparsit, an elderly lady, who had seen better days, and who is highly connected. Mrs. Sparsit has a great-aunt living, called Lady Scadgers. It is a habit with Bounderby always to talk highly of Mrs. Sparsit's social background, just as it is his habit to speak disparagingly of his own family background.

Sissy waiting for instructions. Sissy spends the night at the house of Bounderby under the charge of Mrs. Sparsit. In the morning, Sissy waits to know whether she is to go straight to the school or to Stone Lodge. Bounderby is waiting for Gradgrind to come and tell him his decision after reconsidering his proposal to take Sissy under his protection. Bounderby also reveals to Mrs. Sparsit his intention to take young Tom (Gradgrind's son) as an office hand in his pay as soon as the boy has finished his schooling.

*Wherever Mr. Sleary utters "th", it means "s".

Gradgrind's decision. Gradgrind now arrives, accompanied by his daughter Louisa. Sissy shows due respect to both of them but is found to be somewhat deficient in showing respect towards Mrs. Sparsit whereupon Bounderby rebukes Sissy and asks her never to fail to show to Mrs. Sparsit the respect to which that lady is entitled. Gradgrind has decided to take Sissy home. She will attend school and, when not at school, she will attend upon Mrs. Gradgrind who is rather an invalid. On learning that Sissy used to read fairy stories to her father, Gradgrind warns her never to mention fairies again, and never to breathe a word of such destructive nonsense any more.

Sissy goes to Stone Lodge. So Gradgrind and Louisa take Sissy or Cecilia Jupe off with them to Stone Lodge. On the way Louisa does not speak a single word, good or bad.

Critical comments

Louisa cold towards Sissy. Gradgrind sticks to his previous decision to take Sissy under his protection and to educate her at his school. Accordingly, Sissy is taken by Gradgrind to his house. It is noteworthy that Louisa is quite cold towards Sissy.

A new character. A new character, Mrs. Sparsit, is introduced to us in this chapter. She is as much a target of satire as Gradgrind or Bounderby. She is a widow who was once in affluent circumstances but who has now fallen on evil days and has therefore taken up a job. Bounderby is extra polite to her and never fails to pay compliments to her on her excellent social background. About himself Bounderby generally says something to the following effect : "So far from having high connections I have no connections at all, and I come of the scum of the earth". Incidentally, Mrs. Sparsit has a Roman nose ("the Coriolanian style of nose").

CHAPTER VIII : NEVER WONDER

The undesirability of an attitude of wonder. Both Louisa and Thomas are unhappy at home because of the kind of restrictions their father imposes upon them and the manner in which they are being brought up. For instance, Gradgrind has once objected to Louisa's using an expression : "I wonder", and exhorted her never to wonder. In this sort of thing lies the secret of educating the reason of a child without allowing the sentiments and affections to develop : "Never wonder". The formula to be followed is this : "By means of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division, settle everything somehow, and never wonder." All the eighteen denominations of Coketown, though differing with one another on every other matter, agree on one thing, namely that nobody should ever wonder.

Thomas sick of life. Thomas tells his sister Louisa that he is sick of life and that he hates it altogether. He goes on to say that he will have his revenge when he goes to live with Bounderby because then he will enjoy himself, go about and see something and hear something He will then recompense himself for the way in which he has been brought up. Louisa tells Tom that she has been "wondering" about the life which Tom and she have been leading.

Mrs. Gradgrind's reproof to Louisa. Mrs. Gradgrind happens to overhear Louisa's words that she has been "wondering," and she scolds Louisa in no uncertain terms for wondering when she has expressly been warned by her father never to wonder.

Critical comments

The bad consequences of Gradgrind's system of education. The unwholesome effects of Gradgrind's system of education upon his own children now begin to show themselves. Both Louisa and Thomas are dissatisfied with life and have vague, undefined longings because their emotional and imaginative faculties have consistenty been suppressed. Even Mrs. Gradgrind is opposed to her children's wondering at anything. The Gradgrind children are expected to be conversant with "facts", to take a firm stand on facts, and never to wonder.

Mrs. Gradgrind, half-pathetic, half-comic. Mrs. Gradgrind is a half-comic and half-pathetic character. Her frail body and ill health make her somewhat pathetic, and the kind of sermon that she delivers to Louisa at the end of this chapter makes her comic.

The Coketown people ridiculed. The author has a fling upon the population of Coketown once again in this chapter, when he says that "the eighteen denominations incessantly scratched one another's faces and pulled one another's hair by way of agreeing on the steps to be taken for their improvement—which they never did ; ...... *but all the bodies agreed that they were never to wonder*."

CHAPTER IX : SISSY'S PROGRESS

Sissy's hope. Sissy still believes that her father has not deserted her. She lives in the hope that he would come back. She constantly keeps asking Gradgrind whether he has received any letter for her.

Adverse report about Sissy from the schoolmaster. The schoolmaster (Mr. McChoakumchild) reports to Gradgrind about the scanty progress that Sissy is making at school. According to his report, she has a very thick head for figures, that she is very slow in learning dates, and that she has no aptitude for arithmetic at all.

Sissy's mistakes at school. As Sissy is living in Gradgrind's house she has many opportunities of conversation with Louisa. In the course of one such conversation, Sissy tells Louisa that she makes all sorts of mistakes at school and that the teacher is not at all satisfied with her. When, for instance, the teacher asked her whether the English nation was prosperous or not, she had given a reply which was found to be wrong by the teacher. She had said that she did not know whether it was a prosperous nation or not, and whether she herself was in a thriving state or not, unless she knew who had got the money, and whether any of it belonged to her.

Sissy's account of her father's troubles. Sissy also tells Louisa about the state of depression into which her father had fallen before leaving her. For quite some time, her father had been feeling dissatisfied because, as a clown, his antics no longer made audiences laugh.

Critical comments

The system of education versus common sense. This chapter throws some more light upon the past history and the character of Sissy. Sissy's account of the mistakes that she has been making at school is almost pathetic. It is true that Sissy's answers to the questions which were put to her in the class-room were all wrong if judged by text-book standards, but otherwise her answers show common sense. The questions put to her and the answers given by her are another sad commentary on the kind of education that is being imparted to the children of Coketown.

The comradeship between Sissy and Louisa. Sissy's account of the decline in her father's capacity to make audiences laugh and his subsequent despondency is also pathetic. This girl wins all our sympathy. It is noteworthy that at this stage Louisa is quite favourably disposed towards Sissy and there is a kind of comradeship between the two girls.

CHAPTER X : STEPHEN BLACKPOOL

Stephen, an efficient weaver. Among the industrial workers of Coketown is a man by the name of Stephen Blackpool. This man is forty years of age, though he looks older because of the hard life he has led. He has no position among the workers' leaders who give speeches and carry on debates, but he is a good power-loom weaver, and a man of perfect integrity.

The friendship between Stephen and Rachel. Stephen has a friend by the name of Rachel, a woman only a few years younger than he, being about thirtyfive years old. Rachel is also an industrial worker. Sometimes the two of them happen to meet each other at the end of their working hours and walk some distance together in the direction of their homes.

Walking homewards. One wet evening, Stephen looks for Rachel and waits for her till she joins him. Rachel is happy to see him, though she points out the possible danger of their being seen together too often. It irks Stephen not to be able to keep Rachel's company as frequently as he wants, because of the fear of adverse comment by people. To him life seems to be nothing but a muddle. After walking together for some time, Rachel bids him good night and goes into the house where she lives, while Stephen walks on to his lodgings.

Stephen's drunken wife. When Stephen enters his room, he is shocked to find a woman in his bed. She is a disabled, drunken creature, "a creature so foul to look at, in her tatters, stains, and splashes, but so much fouler than that in her moral infamy, that it was a shameful thing even to see her." When Stephen expresses his annoyance and anger at the presence of this woman, she tells him that she has every right to come to his room whenever she wants. She then flings herself upon the bed heavily and falls into a deep slumber because of the liquor that she has taken. This woman is Stephen's wife (from whom he separated long ago but who keeps making a nuisance of herself to him by coming to him sometimes when she is drunk).

Critical comments

Three new characters in this chapter. This chapter introduces us to three new characters Stephen, Rachel, and the drunken woman who, in a legal sense, is still Stephen's wife. We are given a brief description of the physical appearance and the moral characteristics of each of these three persons. We find both Stephen and Rachel to be extremely likable individuals and Stephen's wife to be an obnoxious character.

Surprise and suspense. There is evidently a new development in the plot in this chapter. Although no link at all has yet been established between these three new characters and the persons whom we have already met in the story, we can already feel that these persons have some important roles to play. This chapter is full of surprises, the biggest surprise being the unexpected visit of the drunken woman to Stephen's lodgings. This visit arouses a feeling of suspense in us. On the whole this is one of the most interesting chapters.

The author's adverse comments on the industrial town. A very important feature of this chapter is some additional comments that the author makes here on Coketown and on its people. This is how the factory areas of Coketown are described : "the innermost fortifications of that ugly citadel, where Nature was as strongly bricked out as killing airs and gases were bricked in." The industrial workers, the author tells us with a pungent irony, are not called workers or labourers or persons ; they are just called "the

hands". Although Dickens tries to convey to us all the ugliness of the factories and the industrial town, he yet shows his awareness of the bright side of these factories when he writes : "The lights in the great factories, which looked, when they were illuminated, like fairy palaces............"

CHAPTER XI : NO WAY OUT

Stephen's interview with his employer, and Stephen's disappointment. On the following day, during the lunch interval, Stephen, in a state of mental distress, calls on his employer, Mr. Bounderby. Mr. Bounderby has no objection to meet Stephen at this unexpected hour, because Stephen has a good reputation as a workman. Stephen seeks his employer's advice with regard to the unwelcome visit of his wife. He tells Mr. Bounderby how he had married this woman, what sacrifices he made for her sake, how he had failed to reform her, and how thereafter he had begun to live apart from her. Much of the story is already known to Bounderby, and all that Bounderby can say now is that Stephen can hardly do anything about it. When Stephen wants to know how he can get rid of his wife, Bounderby reminds him of his marriage vow according to which a Christian husband at the time of marriage accepts a woman "for better and for worse". Stephen says that he has heard of rich folk getting rid of their wives and that there should be some way open to him also so that he can marry another woman who has been a great source of comfort to him during all these years of loneliness. Bounderby points out that, although there is a procedure by which Stephen can get rid of his wife, it is so costly that Stephen is in no position to meet the expenses of it and has therefore to accept his fate. Stephen then goes away, saying that life is "all a muddle", "a muddle altogether", and that the sooner he were dead the better it would be.

Critical comments

Bounderby and Mrs. Sparsit again satirized. The story of Stephen Blackpool now moves further. Stephen's misery is vividly depicted to us in this chapter. But there is no escape for him from his predicament. His plight gives rise to a lot of pity in our hearts. Both Bounderby, Stephen's employer, and Mrs. Sparsit, Bounderby's housekeeper, adopt a purely conventional attitude to Stephen's problem. Bounderby reminds Stephen of his marriage vow, while Mrs. Sparsit regards Stephen's wish to get rid of his wife as typical of the impiety of the working people. Both Bounderby and Mrs. Sparsit are targets of satire in this chapter, as they have been before.

Men treated as machines or just as "hands". Dickens deplores the fact that the labouring class of people should be called "hands" as if they were not full-fledged human beings. He pokes fun at the scientific attitude of mind when he refers to the working

people as "so many hundred hands in this mill ; so many hundred horse steam power." Dickens ridicules the attitude of mind that looks upon human beings as machines.

CHAPTER XII : THE OLD WOMAN

Stephen's meeting an old woman. After coming out of Bounderby's house, Stephen is walking sorrowfully away when he feels a touch upon his arm. It is the hand of an old woman, tall and shapely still, though withered by time. The old woman is neatly and plainly dressed, has country mud upon her shoes, and seems to have come from a journey.

The strange behaviour of the old woman. This woman asks Stephen if he had met the owner of the house from which he had just emerged and if the owner was doing well. Stephen replies that Mr. Bounderby was perfectly well and was eating his lunch with a great appetite. The old woman says that she has covered a distance of forty miles in order to come to this place and that she would be going back in the afternoon. Of the distance of forty miles, she had covered nine miles on foot, and would have to walk the same distance on her way back. She also says that she has been coming to this place every year in order to take a look at the gentleman-owner of that house. On learning that Stephen had worked in the gentleman's factory for a dozen years or so, the old woman catches hold of Stephen's hand and kisses it as the hand of a man who had worked in that fine factory for such a long time.

Meditation upon his unhappy marriage. After leaving the old woman, Stephen walks homewards, meditating upon his unhappy marriage and his inability to get rid of his wife and to marry Rachel.

Critical comments

A new character, and our curiosity. A new character is introduced to us in this chapter. The old woman who meets Stephen and who comes every year to have a look at Bounderby appears to be a mysterious person about whom we know nothing at this stage. However, she gives us the impression of being somewhat sentimental and affectionate. Our curiosity is aroused regarding the purpose of her annual visits to the same place in order to take a look at the same man.

Pathos. The chapter ends with a passage which describes the thoughts of Stephen as he walks homewards. This is a deeply moving passage, because it conveys to us Stephen's profound feelings of frustration and disappointment in life. His wife has wrecked his life, but he cannot get rid of her. Rachel has been a source of great comfort to him, but he cannot possess her. Sentences like the following move us to pity for Stephen : "He thought

of the waste of the best part of his life, of the change it made in his character for the worse every day, of the doubtful nature of his existence...."

CHAPTER XIII : RACHEL

Rachel in attendance upon Stephen's wife. When Stephen enters his house late in the evening, he finds Rachel there. Rachel tells him that his landlady had summoned her a little while ago because someone in his house needed to be looked after. That somebody is, of course, Stephen's wife who lies in his bed in a most wretched condition. Rachel has been tending the sick woman.

Rachel to stay for the night. Seeing Stephen's misery, Rachel tries to console him and tells him that soon his wretched wife would leave him to himself and that in the meantime he should reconcile himself to the situation. Rachel also says that she will stay by the sick woman's side throughout the night because the next dose of medicine has to be administered to her in the early hours of the morning.

Stephen and Rachel dozing in their chairs. Stephen settles down in a chair and closes his eyes, more for Rachel's satisfaction than to rest his tired mind. By slow degrees he falls asleep and sees a long, troubled dream. Rachel also falls asleep in the chair close to the bed.

Rachel's snatching away the bottle of poison from the hands of Stephen's wife. After a while, Stephen wakes up from his nightmare only to see that the sick woman has picked up one of the bottles lying on the table and is about to drink its contents. The sick woman thinks that the bottle contains liquor but actually it contains poison. Stephen sits spell-bound, making no move to stop her. However, just at this moment, Rachel wakes up and, seeing what the sick woman is going to do, snatches away the bottle from her and throws it away.

Critical comments

A gripping chapter. This is a gripping chapter, so far as the plot is concerned. The incident that is described here is almost sensational. From the psychological point of view also, this incident is quite important. When Stephen's wife is about to drink poison thinking it to be liquor, Stephen moves not a muscle, watching her as if paralysed. Rachel, who has every reason to let Stephen's wife die, snatches away the poison from her hands.

The character of Rachel. The incident described in this chapter throws a good deal of light on the character of Rachel. Stephen realises what a great blunder he was going to commit by

having remained passive when his wife was about to drink the contents of the bottle. He is greatly impressed by the nobility of Rachel's action. That is why, with his heart brimming with admiration and affection, he says to her: "Thou art an angel. Bless thee!" We too think Rachel to be an angel. However, Rachel combines modesty with her nobility and replies: "I'm as I have told thee, Stephen, thy poor friend. Angels are not like me." Stephen kisses the border of Rachel's shawl and she leaves, after bidding him good-night in a broken voice. The whole episode is deeply moving.

CHAPTER XIV : THE GREAT MANUFACTURER

Sissy's disappointing performance at school. With the passing of time, Louisa grows into a young woman, and her brother Thomas into a young man. Gradgrind is not at all satisfied with Sissy's progress at school, and feels that Sissy should discontinue going there. Sissy admits her deficiencies and expresses her keen regret at having disappointed her patron's hopes. However, Gradgrind has found Sissy quite useful in the family, and is far from holding her in contempt, even though he has formed a poor opinion about her "calculating" powers.

Gradgrind, a Member of Parliament. Gradgrind's ambition is fulfilled when he is elected Member of Parliament for Coketown. In other respects, there has been absolutely no change in Gradgrind.

Something "uncommonly jolly" about to happen. One evening, when Gradgrind is going out of his house, he tells Louisa that he has to talk to her about something very important and that he would like to do so after breakfast the next day. The same evening Louisa's brother Thomas, who is now working in Bounderby's bank and who is no longer staying at his father's house, comes to meet Louisa and tells her that something splendid is going to happen from his point of view, something that would be "uncommonly jolly". He says that he has just come to give her a hint of what is going to happen, though he believes that she has already guessed it.

Critical comments

The character of Sissy. This chapter throws some more light on the characters of Sissy and Louisa. As Gradgrind points out, Sissy has not been able to become proficient in figures and arithmetic: she is altogether backward and below the mark. Sissy's reply to this, though she herself does not understand the full significance of what she says, is, "Perhaps I tried to learn too much, and if I had asked to be allowed to try a little less, I might have—" In other words, Gradgrind's system of education thrusts too many

facts down a pupil's throat. Even Gradgrind has to acknowledge the human merits of Sissy. For instance, he says to her : "I do not complain of you. You are an affectionate, earnest, good young woman." Sissy is not an ungrateful girl. and she sincerely acknowledges Gradgrind's kindness "to a poor forlorn girl who had no claim upon you."

The character of Louisa. As for Louisa, she grows into a quiet and reserved sort of woman. It is evident that her personality has not been allowed to develop in the way it should have developed. When her father asks her if she is cheerful, her reply is : "I am as cheerful, father, as I usually am, or usually have been." This is the reply of a person who is compelled to accept things as they are and not of a person who is brimming with happiness as a girl of Louisa's age is expected to be.

The character of Tom. Tom, however, presents a picture in contrast. He is talkative, cheerful, and hopeful. He is expecting something "uncommonly jolly" to happen. He also makes it clear that he often takes advantage of his employer Bounderby's weakness for Louisa. It is clear that Louisa feels a sincere affection for Tom.

CHAPTER XV : FATHER AND DAUGHTER

Bounderby's wish to marry Louisa. Next morning Gradgrind holds the promised interview with Louisa. The subject of his talk is really very important. He tells her that Bounderby has expressed a desire to marry her. Gradgrind wants to know what Louisa has to say about Bounderby's proposal. The manner in which Louisa reacts to her father's question leaves us in no doubt that she does not love Bounderby and is most reluctant to marry him. However, Louisa does not reject the proposal but expresses her willingness to marry Bounderby as desired by him and by her father.

No lover in Louisa's life. Gradgrind shows this much consideration for the feelings of Louisa as to ask her whether she has ever secretly entertained any other proposal of marriage from anybody else. To this Louisa's reply is characteristic : "Father, what other proposal can have been made to *me* ? Whom have I seen ? Where have I been ? What are my heart's experiences ?

Mrs. Gradgrind's good wishes. Gradgrind then informs his wife about the outcome of his interview with Louisa, and Mrs. Gradgrind in her own way offers her good wishes to her daughter..

Louisa's changed attitude towards Sissy. When Gradgrind tells his wife about the proposed marriage of Louisa and Bounderby,

Sissy suddenly turns her head and looks, in wonder, in pity, in sorrow, in doubt, towards Louisa. Louisa knows about Sissy's looking at her, but she does not look back at Sissy. From this moment onwards, Louisa changes her attitude towards Sissy altogether, becoming impassive, proud, cold, and keeping Sissy at a distance.

Critical comments

The eminently practical parent—Gradgrind. This chapter further develops Gradgrind's character. Gradgrind has succeeded too well in bringing up Louisa in accordance with his own code. It is true that apparently he does leave the decision with regard to Bounderby's proposal to Louisa herself. But we have no doubt that he desires, and that he expects, Louisa to say "yes." Even when he asks her whether anybody else has ever proposed marriage to her, he does so just out of a sense of duty and not because he wants Louisa to be guided by her affections rather than by her reason. He is once again described by the author as Louisa's "eminently practical parent." It is amusing to know that he wants Louisa to take a decision on the basis of "facts" only. Emotions have no place in his philosophy. The disparity between the ages of Bounderby and Louisa is also a matter not very relevant to the proposal of marriage.

Irony and pathos. There is a lot of irony in this chapter. Most of the speeches of Louisa in reply to her father's questions are fraught with irony. For instance, she says : "You have dealt so wisely with me, father, from my cradle to this hour, that I never had a child's belief or a child's fear." Indeed, we feel very sorry that Louisa is feeling compelled to marry a man whom she does not love at all. We are witnessing the sad consequences of the kind of training and upbringing that Louisa has received at the hands of her eminently practical father who has an unbending, utilitarian, matter-of-fact mind.

Mrs. Gradgrind, a comic character. Mrs. Gradgrind's reaction to Louisa's decision and the manner in which she speaks on this occasion to her daughter are, as was to be expected, comic. We are greatly amused, when she says to Louisa : "I give you joy, my dear—and I believe you may now turn all your ological* studies to good account." We are amused when Mrs. Gradgrind says that she will not know how to address Bounderby. She cannot call him Josiah, because this name is odious to her ; her husband will not allow her to call him Joe ; she cannot address her son-in-law as "mister." "Then, what am I to call him ?" she asks.

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*ological : *i.e.*, "somethingological".

CHAPTER XVI : HUSBAND AND WIFE

Mrs. Sparsit to shift to the bank. Mrs. Sparsit's reaction to Bounderby's announcement that he is going to marry Louisa is unexpectedly one of calmness, because Bounderby had thought that Mrs. Sparsit would either explode in anger or faint in sorrow. Mrs. Sparsit, on learning the news, simply stares at Bounderby in a pitying manner and formally offers her good wishes to him. It is decided that, after the marrige, Mrs. Sparsit would shift from Bounderby's house to an apartment in the building of the bank and that she would continue to get the same "annual compliment" and to enjoy all other facilities to which she is accustomed.

The marriage. After a period of eight weeks, Bounderby gets married to Louisa. At the wedding reception, Bounderby makes a brief speech, saying that he is very happy to be married to Gradgrind's daughter and that he believes her to be worthy of him and himself to be worthy of her. Bounderby and Louisa then leave for Lyons for their honeymoon. Louisa's brother Tom is extremely happy at the marriage.

Critical comments

Irony. There is plenty of humour in this chapter, arising mainly from the irony with which Mrs. Sparsit's behaviour is described. The contrast, between the manner in which Bounderby had expected Mrs. Sparsit to behave and the manner in which she actually behaves on learning the news of his proposed marriage, is extremely amusing. It is also amusing to read the phrase "annual compliment" which Mrs. Sparsit uses for the annual salary that she gets from Bounderby for her services.

Satire. There is a vein of satire too in the passage dealing with the preparations for the marriage : "The business was all **facts**, from first to last."

Tom's jubilation. Tom's feeling of jubilation on the occasion of his sister's marriage with his employer is noteworthy. Obviously he proposes to enjoy all possible privileges as his employer's brother-in-law. He describes the marriage as "uncommonly jolly."

BOOK THE SECOND : REAPING

CHAPTER I : EFFECTS IN THE BANK

Bitzer, a useful spy for Mrs. Sparsit. One afternoon, about a year after the events described above, Mrs. Sparsit is seen sitting in her apartment at Bounderby's bank where she has been residing since Bounderby's marriage. A porter, who is no other than Bitzer, a

former pupil at Gradgrind's school is attending upon her. He has just served Mrs. Sparsit with her afternoon tea ; and Mrs. Sparsit, as usual, has a chat with him about what is happening in the town, because Bitzer, in addition to being a porter at the bank, also performs the duties of a general spy and informer who is duly tipped by Mrs. Sparsit. On this occasion Bitzer informs Mrs. Sparsit that the workers in the factories are continuing their efforts to form a union in order to strengthen themselves against the employers. "Uniting, leaguing, and engaging to stand by one another", says Bitzer with reference to the workers' activities. Mrs. Sparsit deplores the conduct of the workers and says that employers should also get united in order to resist the workers' union. But Bitzer replies that the employers have tried to become united and that their efforts have not proved very successful.

The change in Louisa's brother, Tom. In the course of this chat between Mrs. Sparsit and Bitzer, the latter also takes the occasion to express the view that Thomas (Louisa's brother) has greatly changed since joining Bounderby's bank as an employee. Bitzer describes Thomas as a dissipated, extravagant idler who is not worth his salt. Thomas considers himself a privileged person because he is the brother of his employer's wife.

A stranger with a letter of introduction. A visitor is now announced. The visitor is a complete stranger and he says that he would like to meet Mrs. Sparsit. Mrs. Sparsit has no objection to receiving the visitor who reveals that he carries a letter of introduction to meet Mr. Bounderby, banker, from a friend of his in London. The visitor wants to know where he can meet Mr. Bounderby. The letter of introduction has been given to him by Mr. Gradgrind, M.P. who is in London at this time.

The conversation between Mrs Sparsit and the stranger. In the course of the conversation that now ensues between Mrs. Sparsit and the unknown visitor, the latter learns that Bounderby's wife is not much above twenty years of age. After being told that he will find Mr. Bounderby at his residence, the visitor expresses his thanks to Mrs. Sparsit for the courtesy she has shown him and takes leave of her. When he is gone, Mrs. Sparsit asks Bitzer what he thinks of the gentleman who has just left. Bitzer replies that this gentleman seems to be spending a good deal of money on his clothes ; and Mrs. Sparsit expresses the view that the gentleman's way of dressing certainly shows taste. Bitzer then says that he has a feeling that this gentleman is given to gambling, and Mrs. Sparsit says that gambling is immoral. When Bitzer has also left, Mrs. Sparsit continues to sit at the window long afterwards, lost in her meditations upon the stranger who had paid her a visit.

Critical comments

Our curiosity aroused. A new character is now introduced though we do not know who he is and what his purpose in wishing

to see Mr. Bounderby can be. As he seems to be greatly interested in Bounderby's affairs, and especially in Bounderby's wife, our curiosity is aroused as to what will now happen.

Satire on Mrs. Sparsit. Apart from introducing a new character, this chapter is mainly a satire on Mrs. Sparsit and Bitzer, and it contains also some satire on Coketown and its people. The author ridicules Mrs. Sparsit by referring to her vanity in thinking that her presence adds a feminine grace, as also an aristocratic touch, to the bank-establishment. Indeed, Mrs. Sparsit considers herself, in some sort, "the bank fairy", though the townspeople regard her as "the bank dragon" keeping watch over the treasures of the bank. The author also gives us a mocking account of the manner in which Mrs. Sparsit adjusts her cap and gets ready, with her "classical features", to receive the visitor. Mrs. Sparsit is very proud of the fact that her husband belonged to the family of Powlers. She obviously feels flattered when the stranger tells her that she is a lady of "a very superior and agreeble appearance".

Bitzer satirized. As for Bitzer, we are told that he has grown into an "extremely clear-headed, cautious, prudent young man" whose mind has been so exactly regulated as a result of the education he received at Gradgrind's school that he has now no affection or feeling in his heart. All Bitzer's movements and actions are the result of the nicest and the coldest "calculations." Mrs. Sparsit thinks him to be a young man of the steadiest principle. Evidently, Bitzer is the model product of a model school.

The workers satirized. As for Coketown, the author once again dwells upon its industrial ugliness, its smoke and soot. The author mocks at the people of Coketown by saying that "there never was such fragile china-ware as that of which the millers of Coketown were made."

CHAPTER II : MR. JAMES HARTHOUSE

Bounderby's description of the town, of its people, and of himself, to James Harthouse. The stranger who called on Mrs. Sparsit to make inquiries about Bounderby is a young gentleman by the name of James Harthouse. This gentleman, having got bored with everything he had tried his hand at, has now come to Coketown with a letter of introduction from Gradgrind to meet Bounderby. On learning that a gentleman has come to the town in order to meet him, and that he is staying at the hotel, Bounderby himself goes to see him. Bounderby gives to the gentleman, James Harthouse, a rather unflattering description of Coketown and its people. He says that there is a lot of smoke in this town but that this smoke is "meat and drink" to the people, being the "healthiest thing in all respects, and particularly for the lungs." The work that

the factory hands have to do is described by Bounderby as "the pleasantest, the lightest, and the best-paid" work possible. The workmen have only one ultimate object in life, says Bounderby, and that object is to be "fed on turtle soup and venison with a gold spoon", though this object can never be achieved. Harthouse says that he is in the highest degree instructed and refreshed by the account of the town and its people that Bounderby has given him. Bounderby does not fail to inform his new acquaintance that he does not come of a high family and that he is a man of a humble origin.

Harthouse's motto. Bounderby then takes Harthouse to his residence and introduces his wife Louisa to him. Harthouse finds Louisa to be the most remarkable girl he has ever seen. He enters into a friendly sort of conversation with Louisa, and in the course of this conversation, he tells her that he has gone through many kinds of boredom in his life and that he has come to the conclusion that there is no point in acquiring any particular opinions and convictions. Any set of ideas, says Harthouse, will do just as much good as any other set of ideas or just as much harm as any other set. His motto, he tells Louisa, is : "What will be, will be".

Louisa's obvious affection for her brother, Tom. Harthouse finds that throughout his conversation with Louisa she remains absolutely impassive. At no stage do the features of her face relax. He wonders whether there is anything at all that can move this woman's face. Just then Louisa's brother Thomas appears on the scene. On seeing him, Louisa smiles joyfully and Harthouse comes to the conclusion, that this whelp, her brother, is the only creature she cares for. After coming to this conclusion, Harthouse begins to show a good deal of interest in Thomas, and Thomas feels much flattered by the attentions of this stranger.

Critical comments

The character of James Harthouse ; the use of irony. In this chapter some light is thrown on the character of James Harthouse. There is a lot of irony in the manner in which this man is portrayed. Evidently the author is making fun of Harthouse whose character is indicated in the following sentence : "This vicious assumption of honesty in dishonesty—a vice so dangerous, so deadly, and so common—seemed a little to impress her (Louisa) in his favour." Harthouse is evidently much attracted by Louisa and that is why he now tries to cultivate the friendship of Thomas, her brother, of whom she seems to him to be quite fond.

Bounderby's boastful self-depreciation. This chapter also throws some more light on the characters of Bounderby and Louisa. Bounderby is not in the least suspicious of the intentions of Harthouse towards his wife. On the contrary he encourages him to enter into a conversation with his wife and to pay her any number of

compliments he chooses to pay. As for his pride in his humble origin, he says to Harthouse : "I am a bit of riff-raff, and a genuine scrap of tag, rag, and bobtail." Bounderby's contempt for the workers is seen in the manner in which he describes them to Harthouse.

Louisa, impassive and inscrutable. Louisa's behaviour is especially noteworthy : "She was so constrained, and yet so careless; so reserved, and yet so watchful ; so cold and proud, and yet so sensitively ashamed of her husband's braggart humility. Her features were handsome, but their natural play was so locked up that it seemed impossible to guess at their genuine expression." Indeed, it is difficult for anyone to judge what is going on in the mind of this girl. The only time her features relax is when her brother appear before her.

CHAPTER III : THE WHELP

Some useful information for Harthouse. When Harthouse returns to his hotel from Bounderby's house he cleverly takes Tom with him. Tom is happy in the company of a gentleman of taste who offers him his hospitality in the form of some excellent tobacco and liquor. Partly under the influence of liquor and partly because of the fascination exercised upon him by Harthouse, Tom blurts out certain facts to him about Louisa and Bounderby. He tells Harthouse that Louisa married Bounderby not because she loved him but because her father* wanted her to do so. He also reveals to Harthouse that he is taking full advantage of Louisa's affection for him and is thus obtaining whatever concessions he can from his brother-in-law, Bounderby. The information that Louisa did not marry for love and also that she never had any other lover seems very useful to Harthouse for his own purpose which we can easily guess.

Critical comments

Tom, an irresponsible and selfish man. In this chapter the character of Tom is portrayed in a most unfavourable light. He has done no service either to his brother-in-law or to his sister by disclosing certain facts of their marriage to a man whom he has known for a few hours only. Tom appears to be a most irresponsible and selfish kind of person. The author also says that, if Tom were to realise the damage that he had done to his sister that night, he would have gone and drowned himself in the filthy waters of the nearby river.

Harthouse, not a pleasing character. The character of Harthouse is also portrayed in an unfavourable light. He strikes us

*her father, and, of course, his own too.

as not only very shrewd but cunning. He seems to have a sinister purpose in his mind with regard to Louisa. In order to extract some information from Tom he takes him to his hotel room and plies him with his questions so as to get from him all the facts that he needs; and thereafter he roughly tells Tom to leave his room.

CHAPTER IV : MEN AND BROTHERS

Stephen's failure to join the workers' union. A large number of factory "hands" have gathered together and are being addressed by one of their leaders, called Slackbridge. Slackbridge is quite an accomplished orator of his kind and he is addressing the meeting of factory workers on the subject of one particular worker who has refused to join the Union Aggregate Tribunal, the name which has been given to the workers' union. This particular worker is no other than Stephen Blackpool. Slackbridge calls upon the union to expel Stephen from their ranks and to treat him as an outcast.

Stephen's unconvincing defence of his position. Some of the members of the audience suggest that Stephen should be given an opportunity to state his point of view. Accordingly, Stephen is asked to explain why he is not willing to join the union. Stephen has hardly anything to say in his defence, apart from the fact that he is no orator. His only defence, he says, is that he does not see what good will come out of the activities of the union and that, in view of the troubled life that he has been leading for the past many years, he feels no urge to join the union.

Stephen sent to Coventry. The upshot is that Stephen is dubbed by Slackbridge as a traitor and is, by common consent, ex-communicated. This means that none of the workers will have anything to do with Stephen and that he will be completely isolated.

Stephen's misery in his isolation. Stephen now finds himself to be even more lonely than ever before. He is solitary in the midst of a familiar crowd. The first four days of this isolation appear to him to be so long and miserable that he shudders at the thought of the future. He has not met Rachel all these days. In fact, he has been avoiding every chance of seeing her because he does not want to cause her any embarrassment. If Rachel is seen in his company, the union will take her to task also.

Stephen summoned by Bounderby. After four days Stephen receives a message that Mr. Bounderby wants to speak to him at his residence. The message is given to him by Bitzer, the bank porter. Accordingly, Stephen goes to Bounderby's house.

Critical comments

A leader versus a traitor. This chaptetr shows the emergence of trade unionism among the factory workers of Coketown. Slackbridge is a typical leader, an agitator, a fiery fellow who seeks to sway the audience by his oratory. His condemnation of Stephen is extremely severe and he is not, of course, concerned with the personal troubles and difficulties of an individual who, in his opinion, is a traitor to the workers' cause.

Rachel, Stephen's only sympathiser. Although the formation of a workers' union is in itself a welcome development, our sympathies in this particular case are with Stephen whom we know to be the victim of circumstances. The punishment given to him is too severe, and his only sympathiser in the whole town is Rachel who, however, is helpless. The psychology of a lonely man is effectively described towards the close of this chapter.

CHAPTER V : MEN AND MASTERS

Stephen's refusal to act as an informer. Having learnt that Stephen did not join the workers' union and has therefore been sent to Coventry*, Bounderby wishes to use him for his purpose. Bounderby thinks that Stephen would give him some inside information about the activities of the union and its leaders. Accordingly, he interrogates Stephen, with his wife and James Harthouse present around him, and asks him what is going on in the union and what grievances the workers have. Stephen refuses to act as an informer. However. he does say that the workers are an unhappy lot, following the same routine day in and day out, throughout their lives, till death removes them from the earth.

Workers not devoid of feelings and inclinations. Finding Stephen uncooperative, Bounderby speaks in a bullying manner and threatens to have half a dozen leaders like Slackbridge put on trial on charges of felony and get them sentenced to transportation for life. Stephen's answer is that the "muddle" would remain a muddle even if a hundred Slackbridges were to be transported or drowned in the deepest ocean. Stephen also says that the employers would gain nothing at all through a confrontation with the workers. There can be no question of victory and defeat between the workers and their masters. The masters must stop treating the workers as figures in an arithmetical sum or as machines. The masters should not treat the workers as persons with no feelings, no inclinations, and no souls.

Stephen dismissed from his job. Bounderby now loses his temper with Stephen for supporting the cause of the workers. He

*"sent to Coventry" is a phrase meaning ex-communicated or treated as an outcast.

refers to Stephen as a fellow who would create trouble anywhere, and on this ground dismisses him from his job in the factory. Stephen must quit as soon as he has finished the work which he has at present in hand in the factory. Stephen pleads that if he loses this job he is not likely to get another anywhere, but Bounderby remains adamant. Stephen then leaves, saying : "Heaven help us all in this world."

Critical comments

Stephen's character developed. This chapter develops the character of Stephen. Although he has refused to join the workers' union because, as he says in reply to a question from Bounderby, he had given a promise to that effect to somebody, and although he has been expelled from the workers' community, he is not prepared to act as a traitor to the workers' cause. Far from betraying the workers, he speaks feelingly of the wretchedness of the workers and he pays a tribute to the workers' integrity, saying : "They are true to one another, faithful to one another, affectionate to one another, even to death."

Bounderby's contempt for the workers. Bounderby is his usual boastful, blustering, bullying self. He speaks about the workers most contemptuously, and he speaks to Stephen in haughty tones. He describes the union leaders as "rascals" and "rebels", and refers to Slackbridge as a "scoundrel". Stephen does not, however, like such abusive words being used for the workers or their leaders.

Louisa sympathetic towards the workers. Although Louisa does not say anything at all throughout this interview, Stephen feels that this lady is somewhat sympathetic towards the cause of the workers. That is why he often looks at her while answering Bounderby's questions, and even addresses some of his answers to her. And when he leaves, he glances at Louisa once more.

Stephen's predicament. Our sympathy for Stephen is now deepened. In addition to his other troubles, he is now out of job and thinks that he may have to remain unemployed.

CHAPTER VI : FADING AWAY

Rachel and the old woman. On coming out of Bounderby's house, Stephen meets Rachel who has been waiting for him. In Rachel's company he finds the old woman whom he had once previously met when she had been waiting outside Bounderby's house in order to have a look at that "great" man. The old woman explains that she met Rachel by chance when she was standing outside Bounderby's house as she has always done on the occa ion of her annual visit to this place. This time the old woman was very eager to

have a look at Bounderby's wife after having heard that Bounderby had got married. Stephen tells her that Mrs. Bounderby is young and handsome, and has "fine, dark, thinking eyes." Stephen then takes Rachel and the old woman to his lodging for a cup of tea. Rachel asks if he has given up his job, and he replies that it is the job that has given him up.

Mrs. Bounderby (Louisa) to see Stephen. On being asked whether she has any children, Mrs. Pegler (for such is the old woman's name) replies that she had a son whom however she has "lost." Just then the landlady comes and says that Mrs. Bounderby has come to meet Stephen. Mrs. Pegler feels alarmed and says that no notice should be taken of her and that she should be allowed to remain in a corner, completely in the background.

Louisa accompanied by Tom. Louisa now appears. She is accompanied by the whelp, her brother Tom. At first Louisa mistakes Rachel for Stephen's wife, but she then understands that Rachel is the woman whom Stephen wants so much to marry if he could get rid of his wife. Louisa also learns that it was because of his promise to Rachel that Stephen had refused to join the union. Rachel explains that she had advised Stephen in his own interest to keep away from the union activities.

Louisa's gift of money to Stephen. Louisa then takes out a large bank note and offers it to Stephen as a kind of help in his present state of unemployment and uncertainty. In order not to displease a woman who has felt sympathetic towards him, Stephen accepts an amount of only two pounds, and even that as a loan which he promises to repay.

Tom's private instructions to Stephen. When Louisa is about to leave, Tom speaks to Stephen separately, and privately instructs him to hang around the bank in the evenings at the end of his work in the factory. Stephen has still to work in the factory for two or three days in order to complete the weaving on which he is engaged, and he promises to wait for Tom's message outside the building of the bank in the evenings for the few days that he will still be working. Tom says that Stephen will hear something to his own advantage if he waits at the appointed place. Tom names Bitzer as the messenger who will carry Tom's message.

Critical comments

Stephen and Rachel bid farewell to each other. Louisa and Tom leave, and Mrs. Peglar expresses her admiration for Mrs. Bounderby whom she describes as "such a pretty dear." Stephen and Rachel then accompany Mrs. Pegler to the inn where she is to spend the night before going back to the country. After leaving

Mrs. Pegler there, Stephen and Rachel walk back and bid each other a sentimental farewell. They both think that it would be much the better course if during the remaining two or three days that Stephen has still to work in the factory, they keep away from each other. Stephen has decided that, after his work in the factory is over, he will leave Coketown in order to try his luck elsewhere, though the prospects are very dim.

No communication from Tom ; Stephen departs. As directed by Tom, Stephen hangs around the building of the bank in the evenings after coming back from the factory for the next two or three days, but his wait each day proves futile. He receives no communication from Tom. On the fourth day, Stephen leaves Coketown very early in the morning when people have not yet got up from their beds.

Critical comments

A sense of mystery and the feeling of suspense. In this chapter we again meet the old woman, who is so curious to have a look at Bounderby once in a year. Now we learn that the old woman's name is Mrs. Pegler, that she is a widow, and that she had a son whom, however, she has "lost". We still do not know who she is and what interest she has in Bounderby or in Bounderby's wife. There seems to be a mystery here because, on hearing the name of Bounderby's wife from the landlady's lips, Mrs. Pegler looks scared and wants to hide hereself. For some unknown reason she does not wish to face either Bounderby or Bounderby's wife. All this, of course, gives rise to a feeling of suspense in our minds.

Louisa's act of sympathy and kindness. Louisa's character once again appears to us in a favourable light. Although she has seen Stephen only for a short while when her husband was interrogating him, she has already formed a good opinion about the man and has come all the way to his lodging in order to speak words of comfort to him and offer financial help to him. Louisa's entire conduct through this meeting with Stephen and Rachel is highly commendable.

Tom's mysterious instructions to Stephen. There is something mysterious about Tom's instructions to Stephen to wait outside the bank in the evenings for a communication from him. Evidently he has some kind of mischief in his mind because he is not the kind of man who means to do any good to anybody. This episode also gives rise to a feeling of suspense in our minds. Stephen waits and waits but nothing happens. However, we have a feeling that this is not the end of the matter.

Genuine love. The love which Stephen and Rachel have for each other is genuine and deep. Rachel does not desert Stephen in his forlorn condition. The parting between them is very pathe-

tic : "It was but a hurried parting in a common street, yet it was a sacred remembrance to these two common people." Stephen's last words to Rachel are : "Heaven bless thee ! Heaven thank thee and reward thee ! Good night, good bye !"

The author's warning. The author at this point interrupts the story to address "utilitarian economists, skeletons of schoolmasters, and commissioners of fact" and to exhort them to cultivate affections, feelings, and graces and not to develop a purely mechanical attitude towards life. The author's warning to all these people is : "Reality will take a wolfish turn and make an end of you."

Pathetic departure. The departure of Stephen from Coketown is described in very moving terms. The town is entirely deserted when Stephen leaves. Everything looks "wan" at that early morning hour. Even the coming sun makes but "a pale waste in the sky, like a sad sea." It seems very strange to Stephen to have to bid farewell to a town where he has worked so long. With his bundle under his arm, Stephen departs, leaving his true and loving heart behind with Rachel.

CHAPTER VII : GUNPOWDER

Harthouse's growing intimacy with Louisa. James Harthouse has by now become thoroughly accustomed to his new environment in Coketown and to the circle of the "Hard Fact fellows" with whom he is associating. All his associates in Coketown think him to be a man of much promise. He has also been meeting Louisa on terms of what might be called intimacy. He has succeeded in convincing her that his attitude to life, the attitude of "honesty in dishonesty", is the most practical. Indeed, his philosophy seems to have come as a relief and justification to Louisa who had all her life been suppressed and inhibited. Harthouse has as yet no particular design or plan in his mind, but he is certainly conscious of a desire to worm himself into Louisa's confidence, and by this means to acquire a hold upon her. To this end he often visits Bounderby's house, and is even encouraged in his visits by Bounderby himself. Bounderby has acquired a country estate, about fifteen miles from Coketown, where he and Louisa now live, and it is to this new residence that Harthouse often comes. Here he has frequent opportunities of meeting Louisa when she is alone.

Louisa unable to meet all Tom's financial liabilities. On one occasion, Harthouse seeks Louisa's permission to speak to her about a particular and personal matter. The subject on which he talks to her is her brother, Tom. He points out the many favours that she has done to her brother because of her extreme attachment to him, and tries to make her conscious of the fact that Tom is absolutely ungrateful to her. She confesses that she has been giving him money to meet his gambling debts, and that she has even

sold a few of her trinkets in order to give him the required amount of money, though she has not been able to give him all that he demanded.

The success of Harthouse's strategy. After this conversation with Louisa, Harthouse has a private talk with Tom who happens to visit his sister's house just then. Finding Tom in a miserable condition, Harthouse offers to pull him out of his financial difficulties. But Tom says that money can no longer help him. If he had got money at the time he needed it, he would not have been in his present predicament which, however, he does not exactly define. Harthouse thereupon urges him to give some sign of his gratitude to his sister for all that she has been doing for him. That evening, at dinner, Tom is particularly affectionate towards Louisa, and Louisa knows that it is the influence of Harthouse that is working upon Tom. For the first time, Louisa gives Harthouse a smile which she never before gave to anybody except to Tom. Harthouse inwardly reflects that his strategy has worked.

Critical comments

The baseness of Harthouse. No doubt is now left in our minds regarding the baseness of James Harthouse. He is using every possible device to win Louisa's confidence. His technique of assuming honesty in dishonesty is yielding rich dividends.

Psychological realism. The effect of Harthouse's devices upon Louisa's mind is psychologically true and, therefore, convincing. In this connection Dickens rightly observes : "Upon a nature long accustomed to self-suppression, thus torn and divided, the Harthouse philosophy came as a relief and justification."

Tom a puppet in the hands of Harthouse. Tom is also a puppet in the hands of Harthouse. Harthouse can prevail upon him to behave in any particular manner that suits Harthouse's strategy. Tom's financial troubles, resulting from his habits of gambling and extravagance, are no secret from Harthouses and the latter is able to extract from Louisa the confession that she has been rendering financial assistance to Tom off and on, though not to the extent he needed.

Our curiosity aroused. On the whole, this is an interesting chapter which arouses our curiosity as to what will now happen and what direction the Harthouse-Louisa relationship will take.

CHAPTER VIII : EXPLOSION

The growing intimacy between Harthouse and Louisa. Harthouse has succeeded in establishing an intimate relationship with Louisa and can now hold confidential conversations with her,

keeping her husband out of such conversations. Louisa has no idea what form this growing intimacy between her and Harthouse will ultimately take. Harthouse himself has at this stage no clear-cut aim or design with regard to Louisa. Both seem to be drifting towards something unpredictable. Harthouse is a believer in the view that "what will be, will be".

A robbery at Bounderby's bank. The next day, when Harthouse is returning on horseback from a public engagement, he suddenly encounters Bounderby who, in shocked tones, informs him that a robbery has taken place at his bank. Although the sum stolen is only a hundred and fifty pounds, Bounderby cannot reconcile himself to the fact that a robbery should at all have taken place at his bank. Harthouse asks if somebody is suspected of having committed this robbery. Bounderby replies that the man suspected is Stephen Blackpool with whom he had had a row and whom he had dismissed from his factory in Harthouse's presence. Bounderby also reveals that Stephen had been seen loitering about the building of the bank for two or three days in the evenings before his departure from Coketown, and that he had also met an old woman who, says Bounderby, might be Stephen's accomplice. Louisa who is also present at the scene inwardly recalls the fact that, on the occasion of her visit to Stephen's lodging, she had noticed a woman in the room and that this woman had seemed to be shrinking from observation.

Mrs. Sparsit to stay at Bounderby's house. As Mrs. Sparsit's nerves seem to have been shaken by the robbery at the bank, Bounderby decides that she should stay at his house for a few days in order to recover from the shock. Accordingly, he informs Louisa of this decision.

Louisa's suspicion. That night Louisa feels very uncomfortable. A suspicion that the theft at the bank might have been committed by her brother Tom, who had constantly been hard up on account of his gambling habits, had crossed her mind Accordingly, she waits that night for her brother to return home. It is past midnight when Tom comes home. Louisa stealthily goes into his room and asks him if he has anything special to tell her. Tom expresses surprise at this question. Louisa asks him the same question three or four times in order to probe him, even giving him an assurance that her affection for him would remain unchanged in case he reveals something which might be regarded as unpleasant and objectionable. But Tom says that he has nothing at all to tell her. However, when Louisa goes back to her own room, Tom bursts into tears, crying upon his pillow and hating himself for what he has done.

Critical comments

Bounderby's vanity hurt. An important event is described in this chapter. This event in Bounderby's eyes is quite sensatio-

nal. Bounderby's vanity is greatly hurt by the fact that a robbery has been committed at his bank. The manner, in which Bounderby informs Harthouse of the robbery, creates the impression in our minds that Bounderby thinks a national disaster has taken place. The fact of the robbery gives yet another opportunity to Bounderby to express his contemptuous opinion about the working people. He feels quite sure that Stephen is the culprit.

Louisa's excellent opinion about Stephen. Although the circumstances described by Bounderby do point to Stephen as the culprit, Louisa does not suspect that man. Even though she recalls having seen an old woman in Stephen's room, Stephen struck her as being a man of integrity. Her thoughts therefore turn to her brother Tom. She tries her utmost to draw a confession from Tom, but Tom does not admit the theft, though his bursting into tears when Louisa has gone, clearly shows that it is he who committed the theft. We already hold Tom in contempt for his unscrupulousness, and now we dislike him even more.

Mrs. Sparsit, a comic character. Mrs. Sparsit's whole behaviour in this chapter shows her to be a malicious person. Although she is very spiteful, she also appears as decidedly a comic character. She is a great hypocrite and pretends for Bounderby a concern which she does not really feel. The manner in which she describes Bitzer's snoring, the manner in which she refers to her high or aristocratic connections, the manner in which she tries to cheer up Bounderby, and her constant reference to Louisa as Miss Gradgrind instead of as Mrs. Bounderby, are all very funny.

CHAPTER IX : HEARING THE LAST OF IT

Unpleasantness between Bounderby and Louisa. Mrs. Sparsit is now staying at Bounderby's house. Her manner towards Bounderby is so humble and cringing that it makes Bounderby swell with a feeling of importance and even fills him with a sense of irritation against Louisa who, he thinks, is always indifferent towards his needs and moods. As a consequence, there is an unpleasant scene between Bounderby and Louisa to which Harthouse is a witness.

Mrs. Gradgrind's death. Louisa now receives a message that her mother is seriously ill at Stone Lodge. She therefore travels to Coketown in order to see her mother who may be dying. She finds Sissy attending upon Mrs. Gradgrind with the utmost devotion. Louisa's attitude towards Sissy has remained cold since the day the news of her forthcoming marriage with Bounderby had been broken. Mrs. Gradgrind is indeed dying. Before death, she says to Louisa that, in spite of all his "ologies", Mr. Gradgrind has missed or forgotten something which, however, Mrs. Gradgrind cannot at this time remember or define.

Critical comments

Two developments in the plot. There are two developments in this chapter so far as the plot is concerned. One is the tiff which Louisa and her husband have in the presence of Mrs. Sparsit and Harthouse. Secondly, Mrs. Gradgrind, who had always been a feeble woman, makes her exit from this world.

Mrs. Sparsit a source of comedy. There is plenty of comedy in this chapter. In the first place, Mrs. Sparsit continues to be the target of biting satire. For instance, there are sarcastic references to Mrs. Sparsit's "Coriolanian eyebrows", her "classical eyes", her "rigid nose", etc. Then we are told that she was "a most wonderful woman for prowling about the house". There is also her hypocrisy in her relations with her employer. For instance, she kisses Bounderby's hand, calling him her benefactor and expressing her profound gratitude to him for his patronage. But, in private, she shakes her fist at Bounderby's portrait and makes faces at it.

Mrs. Gradgrind, a source of comedy. Mrs. Gradgrind's behaviour and talk are also a source of comedy, in spite of the fact that she lies on her death-bed, an occasion when normally Dickens would move us to the deepest possible sympathy by means of a pathetic account of the last moments of a human being on this earth. We are amused to learn that, unable to hit upon a suitable name by which to address her son-in-law, she had just been calling him "J" (because Bounderby's first name is "Josiah"). When Louisa askes her if she is in pain, Mrs. Gradgrind replies, "I think there is a pain somewhere in the room, but I could not positively say that I have got it." Mrs. Gradgrind's reference to her husband's addiction to "ologies" has also a comic touch.

CHAPTER X : MRS. SPARSIT'S STAIRCASE

Mrs. Sparsit's strange behaviour. Mrs Sparsit continues to stay at Bounderby's house for several weeks, even though the idea was that she would stay there only for a few days in order to recover her nerves. Even when she ultimately leaves, Bounderby decides that she should visit his house every week end. During her period of stay at Bounderby's house, she has assiduously been looking after his needs. She has all this time been expressing her sympathy for him in his presence and shaking her fist at his portrait in private, at the same time calling him a "noodle" in a contemptuous manner when standing before the portrait.

Mrs. Sparsit spying on Louisa and Harthouse. Mrs. Sparsit has been watching also, with a hawk's eyes, the behaviour of Harthouse and Louisa towards each other. Although Louisa's reserve is impenetrable, yet Mrs. Sparsit, building upon her obser-

vations, has come to the conclusion that the relations between Harthouse and Louisa will rapidly develop into a love-intrigue. Mrs. Sparsit in her imagination builds up a huge staircase, with a dark pit of shame and ruin at the bottom ; and down these stairs, from day to day and hour to hour, she sees Louisa descending into the pit. In other words, Mrs. Sparsit has no doubt that Louisa will soon become Harthouse's mistress and in this way morally degrade herself and her husband. However, Mrs. Sparsit feels no sympathy at all for Bounderby and thinks, on the contrary, that Bounderby will rightly be served for having married Louisa.

A private conversation. Harthouse is now so close to Louisa that they often sit together and speak to each other in low tones. On one such occasion, Mrs. Sparsit sees them from a distance talking to each other in whispers, Harthouse's face almost touching Louisa's hair. Actually, Louisa and Harthouse are at this time talking about the robbery that had taken place at the bank. Louisa, unable to believe that Stephen has committed the robbery, seeks Harthouse's opinion in the matter. Harthouse's view, however, is that all the evidence points to Stephen. Harthouse and Louisa then walk away, she leaning upon his arm, and Mrs. Sparsit imagines Louisa going down the staircase quite fast. Mrs. Sparsit has not the slightest intention of interrupting Louisa's descent. In fact, she is eager to see the descent accomplished, and she waits for the final step.

Critical comments

Mrs. Sparsit's wickedness. Mrs. Sparsit now assumes the shape of a villain in our eyes. She is not just a hypocrite ; she actually wishes Bounderby ill. Though she is convinced that very soon Harthouse will succeed in seducing Louisa, she does nothing to warn Bounderby of what might happen. On the contrary, she gleefully awaits such a consummation "as for the ripeness and fulness of the harvest of her hopes." .However, the staircase which she has built up in her imagination is described by the author in a comic manner. Mrs. Sparsit is an accomplished spy, and watches the movements of the two suspects with the eyes of a hawk.

CHAPTER XI : LOWER AND LOWER

A business-like burial. Mr. Gradgrind is in London when the news of his wife's death reaches him. He comes back to Coketown and then returns to London promptly, after burying his wife "in a businesslike manner".

Louisa's baffling reserve. There is a curious reserve about Louisa which baffles Mrs. Sparsit, at the same time stimulating her. It seems to Mrs. Sparsit that on certain occasions Louisa behaves as if she were about to fall into the pit at the bottom of the staircase.

And there are times when it seems that Harthouse may not be able to win her over.

Bounderby called away. So time passes. One day Bounderby is called away from home by some business which will require his presence elsewhere for three or four days. Mrs. Sparsit is, as already arranged, visiting Bounderby's house on week-ends, and Bounderby asks her not to fail to visit his house even during the period that he will be away.

Harthouse expected to meet Tom. Before going to Bounderby's house that particular week-end, Mrs. Sparsit invites Tom to have some food and drink in her company at the bank. From Tom she learns that Harthouse is away to Yorkshire, on a shooting expedition. However, Harthouse is to return to Coketown on the following day, and Tom is to receive him in the evening at the station.

Mrs. Sparsit's shrewd guess. The next day, Saturday, Mrs. Sparsit also goes to the station, and, standing at a spot where she remains unseen, looks for Harthouse to arrive by the train. Tom is present at the station, waiting for the train which is to bring Harthouse. But there is no sign of Harthouse when the train arrives. Mrs. Sparsit at once comes to the conclusion that Harthouse has played a trick upon Tom and that, in actual fact, Harthouse may be with Louisa at Bounderby's country home.

Mrs. Sparsit, a witness to a love scene. Without any delay, Mrs. Sparsit sets out for Bounderby's house, especially because on week-ends she is supposed to go there. Arriving there, Mrs. Sparsit sees Louisa and Harthouse in the wood close to the house. Getting close to where they are, Mrs. Sparsit overhears Harthouse speaking to Louisa in amorous tones, calling her his "dearest love," and telling her that he can no longer do without her. Mrs. Sparsit also overhears Louisa's reply that she cannot give him her company much longer at that particular spot. Mrs. Sparsit then sees Louisa walking away.

Mrs. Sparsit in pursuit of Louisa. A little later, Mrs. Sparsit sees Louisa going out of the house stealthily and hastily, cloaked and muffled. It occurs to Mrs. Sparsit that Louisa is going to run away with Harthouse. But Louisa is going to the station. It seems to Mrs. Sparsit that Louisa will first go to Coketown whither Harthouse will ride on horseback, that they will join each other in Coketown, and that then they will travel to some other destination. Mrs. Sparsit follows Louisa into the same compartment which Louisa boards at the station, keeping herself out of Louisa's view. When the train arrives at Coketown, Mrs. Sparsit expects Louisa to get into a carriage ; but before Mrs. Sparsit can follow, Louisa disappears.

Critical comments

We read this chapter breathlessly because of the rapid succession of events in it. The tempo of the story has greatly increased. Suspense is the keynote of this chapter, and the plot gains considerably in interest. There are dramatic developments.

Harthouse's intentions have now taken a definite shape. His aim evidently is to seduce Louisa and to have her as a mistress. He is taking full advantage of the liberal attitude of Bounderby towards his friendship with Louisa. The discord between Louisa and her husband is a great help to Harthouse. Harthouse is proving to be a man with no scruples.

Mrs. Sparsit is an accomplished spy. Her imagination, however, outstrips the reality. The author gives us a very amusing picture of her extravagant conjectures through the image of a huge staircase down which Louisa appears to be coming. Her feverish pursuit of Louisa is also rather comic and so is her discomfiture at the end of the chapter when Louisa disappears and Mrs. Sparsit tells herself tearfully : "I have lost her".

CHAPTER XII : DOWN

Louisa's arrival at her father's house. Instead of eloping with Harthouse, however, Louisa arrives at her father's house. Gradgrind is at home as Parliament is in recess. It is raining very hard when Louisa enters the house, to the utter amazement of her father. Without any preliminaries, she tells him that she wishes to speak to him. He looks at her doubtfully and apprehensively.

Louisa's wrecked life. Lousia then tells him that, as a result of the manner in which she has been brought up by him from her childhood, all the sentiments of her heart, all her affections, all the graces of her soul have remained utterly suppressed. He got her married to a husband whom she hates. In this unnatural state of mind, she has spent her days wretchedly and miserably. Her nature has always rebelled against rules, figures, and definitions which dominated her life. She could have been a million times wiser, happier, and more contented if she had been allowed to grow freely and not under a strict artificial discipline. She also says that, if she agreed to marry Bounderby, it was because, firstly, she did not want to disappoint her father and, secondly, because she hoped to prove useful to her brother Tom who was working in Bounderby's bank.

Louisa's present predicament and her desire to be saved. Louisa next tells her father that she has not come to reproach him. There is something else which she wants to speak to him about. As chance would have it, she became acquainted with a

man who, by slow degrees, got close to her. There seemed to be an inner affinity between her and this man, because he seemed to understand her and to read her thoughts whenever they were together. Now this man has declared himself her lover, and he is now expecting her to join him and run away with him. She does not know her own mind at this time. She does not know whether she is sorry, whether she is ashamed, whether she is degrading herself. All that she knows is that her father's philosophy and his teaching cannot save her. She would like her father to save her now by some other means. Saying these words, Louisa collapses and sinks to the floor.

Critical comments

An unexpected development. The story now takes an unexpected turn. Like Mrs. Sparsit, we too were thinking that Louisa was hastening to meet Harthouse in order to elope with him. However, we find that, under certain internal pressures, she betakes herself to her father's house and states the whole position to her father as candidly as she can. In other words, Louisa does not give way to her impulses, and allows her intellect to dominate her even in a situation in which another woman would have been swayed by her passions.

The failure of Gradgrind's system of education. This chapter also shows most convincingly the futility of Gradgrind's system of education which puts all the emphasis on facts and ignores certain basic needs of the human personality. Without directly criticising Gradgrind's system of education, Dickens exposes its frustrating and crippling effects upon Gradgrind's own daughter. The failure of this system of education could not have been more vividly depicted by any other method. Nor does Gradgrind himself fail to realise the damage that his system has done to Louisa.

Louisa, a woman of integrity. By her action in coming to her father, instead of running away with her lover, Louisa raises herself in our eyes. She shows herself to be a woman of integrity, and does not betray the trust that her father and her husband have reposed in her in spite of the fact that she is disillusioned with one and hates the other.

The height of pathos. The situation presented in this chapter is deeply moving. The very height of pathos is reached in this chapter in the confession that Louisa makes to her father. This chapter represents the climax of the novel. Incidentally, this chapter marks also the end of Book II.

BOOK THE THIRD : GARNERING

CHAPTER I : ANOTHER THING NEEDFUL

Gradgrind's realization of his error. When Louisa regains consciousness, she finds her little sister attending upon her. After a while her father comes and tells her that he is feeling much grieved by her revelations and that he fully realises his responsibility for the circumstances which have led to her present predicament. Gradgrind also tells her that he hardly knows what advice to give to her in her present situation All his life he believed that the wisdom of the head was greater than the wisdom of the heart, thinking the head to be all-sufficient, but now he has to revise his ideas. Gradgrind says that he is bitterly reproaching himself for Louisa's plight, even though she has not in so many words reproached him.

A new relationship between Louisa and Sissy. When her father has gone, Sissy appears in the room and asks her if she may attend upon her. Ever since the day it was decided that Louisa would marry Bounderby, Louisa has maintained an attitude of coldness towards Sissy. But now Sissy's tenderness and affection for Louisa overcome Louisa's resistance to her, and Louisa softens. Louisa then expresses her regret to Sissy that she has been so proud, so hard-hearted, so resentful and unjust to everyone and even to herself. Louisa then seeks Sissy's foregiveness and appeals to her to give her all the sympathy and compassion that she can give her in her present need. Sissy is greatly touched by Louisa's words, and in this way a new relationship between the two women is established.

Critical comments

The development in Gradgrind's character. This chapter shows an important development in Gradgrind's character. The man who was inflexible in holding and implementing his theory of education for such a long time at last realises his folly. Overtaken by his domestic disaster, he finds how mistaken he has been, in his ideas and in the way he brought up his children. However, it is now too late, because Louisa's life has already been wrecked.

Pathos in Louisa's softening towards Sissy. Another important development in this chapter is the new relationship that comes into existence between Louisa and Sissy. In fact, this new relationship is a continuation of the cordiality that once existed between the two girls and which was suspended for a time by Louisa's cold reserve towards Sissy after her marriage. The reconciliation between the two girls is very moving. Indeed, pathos is the keynote of this chapter also. The melting of Louisa's heart towards Sissy produces a deep effect upon the reader also.

CHAPTER II : VERY RIDICULOUS

Harthouse baffled. Harthouse, on his side, had been waiting for Louisa to join him. Louisa had not rejected him ; to his importunities, she had only been saying : "Not here". Mrs. Sparsit, overhearing these words, had interpreted them to mean that Louisa could not agree to yield to her lover's embraces at that particular spot. Harthouse had also thought that Louisa was only trying to put him off for the time being and that very soon she would surrender to him. Great is his irritation, therefore, when he finds no sign of Louisa either at her house or anywhere in Coketown. It could never occur to him that she would go to her father's house, Stone Lodge.

Harthouse waiting. Thinking that something might have happened to detain Louisa, Harthouse decides to wait for her or a message from her at the hotel where he resides in Coketown. He does not know whether he will receive a hostile message, or a promise of a secret meeting, or words of regret, from Louisa. He tries to comfort himself with his philosophy : "What will be, will be."

A visit from a pretty young woman. A waiter comes and tells Harthouse that a young lady wishes to see him. Moments later, Harthouse finds himself face to face with a young woman whom he had never before seen. She is plainly dressed ; she is very quiet ; and she is very pretty. The young woman says that she wishes to have a little talk with him. She also requests him to keep her visit a complete secret.

The young woman's plain, blunt manner of speaking to Harthouse. The young woman then proceeds to inform Harthouse that Mrs. Bounderby (that is, Louisa) had arrived at her father's house the previous night in a state of great agitation. The young woman then tells Harthouse that he can be sure that Mrs. Bounderby will never see him again as long as he lives. At the same time the young woman makes it clear that, though she has stated the position correctly it was not Louisa who had sent her here or deputed her to communicate this position to him. She has taken upon herself the duty of informing him of where matters stand and it is because she knows Louisa's character and the circumstances of her marriage thoroughly well that she has come to the conclusion which she has already conveyed to him. The young woman also appeals to Harthouse to depart from Coketown that very night and never to come back. She says that Harthouse should comply with this request in order to make amends to Louisa for the wrong and the harm that he has done to her.

Harthouse willing to accept his visitor's advice. Harthouse is completely taken aback, not to say embarrassed, by his visitor's

words. However, it would be wrong to say that Harthouse is shocked or terribly disappointed. All that he says is that, although he is not a moral sort of fellow, he did not have any particularly evil intention towards Louisa, and that, whatever has happened, was the result of an imperceptible and continuing process of growing intimacy between him and Louisa. He then agrees to comply with his visitor's wishes.

Harthouse's defeat complete. When the young woman is about to leave, Harthouse asks her who she is and whether she is related to Louisa's family. The visitor reveals that her name is Sissy Jupe, that she is only a poor girl who was separated from her father, a stroller, and taken by Mr. Gradgrind under his protection. After learning the identity of his visitor, Harthouse inwardly thinks that his defeat is complete. Only a poor girl, the daughter of a stroller, was needed to complete the defeat.

Harthouse to leave Coketown for good. When his visitor is gone, Harthouse picks up a pen and writes three notes, one to his brother, another to Bounderby, and the third to Gradgrind, informing all of them that he is leaving Coketown for good.

Critical comments

Sissy, a woman with initiative and courage. This chapter throws a good deal of light upon the character of Sissy Jupe. Sissy shows herself to be a very courageous and enterprising woman. Even though she has not been asked by Louisa to undertake the kind of mission Sissy has undertaken, Sissy does so at her own initiative. Sissy decides to do what, in her judgment, would be the best course for both Louisa and Harthouse, and we fully endorse her judgment in the matter.

The streak of gentlemanliness and decency in Harthouse. This chapter also throws some more light on the character of Harthouse. The man is not, after all, a scoundrel. There are some traces of gentlemanliness in him still. He is not so wicked as to try to blackmail Louisa. The manner in which he accepts the advice which is tendered to him by Sissy shows a certain amount of decency in him.

Harthouse calm. It is noteworthy that Harthouse does not fly into a rage, nor is he plunged into grief, on learning of the turn which events have taken. He does not lose his composure even for a minute ; he remains perfectly cool and calm, and though he does feel crestfallen, he accepts the position without making any fuss.

The comic aspect of the situation. Harthouse even perceives the comic aspect of the situation. His plans with regard to

Louisa have been defeated ; but what is most galling to his self-respect is the fact that matters should have been finally brought to an end through the enterprise of a poor dependant of the family. It is this realisation that makes him say to himself : "The defeat may now be considered perfectly accomplished." The irony in the situation is obvious.

CHAPTER III : VERY DECIDED

Bounderby's alarm. Mrs. Sparsit, after having lost sight of Louisa at the railway station, had directly gone to London where Bounderby happened to be at that time, staying in a hotel. On being told by Mrs. Sparsit that his wife had eloped with Harthouse, Bounderby rushes back to Coketown by the first available train. Accompanied by Mrs. Sparsit, Bounderby now bursts into his father-in-law's house and tells him that something has happened on hearing which Gradgrind will be struck dumb. Bounderby does not, of course, yet know that his wife did not run away but is in this very house, lying sick.

Mrs. Sparsit in tears. When the true facts are revealed to Bounderby by Gradgrind, Mrs. Sparsit finds herself in a false position. She could never have imagined that Louisa would go to her father's house. Seeing no way to defend herself, Mrs. Sparsit now takes refuge in tears. Bounderby orders her to go to her apartment at the bank without any delay.

Bounderby's ultimatum. Gradgrind tells Bounderby that Louisa had been very unhappy with him and that, having learnt from Louisa all the facts of the case, he cannot exonerate himself from his responsibility in the matter. Gradgrind then suggests that Louisa should be allowed to stay where she is for a few days and that, after she has recovered her balance of mind, she would go back to Bounderby. Bounderby finds this suggestion very insulting to himself. So he tells Gradgrind that, if Louisa does not go back to his house by noon the next day, she should stay on permanently where she is now and that he will have nothing to do with her. Saying these words, Bounderby leaves Stone Lodge.

Bounderby's life as a "bachelor". On the following day Bounderby waits for Louisa to return home. When the clock has struck twelve and there is no sign of Louisa, Bounderby gives instructions to a servant to pack up Louisa's clothes and to deliver the same at Gradgrind's house. The next step taken by Bounderby is to advertise his country home for sale. He then begins a new life which may be described as the life of a bachelor.

Critical comments

Mrs. Sparsit's hopes fail. This chapter throws some more light on the characters of all the persons involved. Mrs. Sparsit's over-

enthusiasm lands her in trouble. She was trying not only to serve her master but also to gratify her feelings of malice and spite against him and his wife. Her hopes are, however, dashed to the ground and she is unceremoniously despatched to her apartment at the bank.

The grace in Gradgrind. Gradgrind sticks by his daughter. Having realized that he is largely responsible for bringing misery to his daughter, he not only confesses his part but tries to justify her conduct. He now rises in our estimation and partly redeems himself in our eyes.

Bounderby's blustering manner. Bounderby speaks in his usual blustering, self-important manner, and makes a complete fool of himself too. Instead of trying to understand the working of his wife's mind and the value of Gradgrind's advice, he gives an ultimatum to them both.

Development in the plot. There is an important development in the plot. Bounderby's ultimatum having been ignored, he now decides to separate from his wife and to resume "a bachelor life."

The comic elements. We are greatly amused by the predicament in which Mrs. Sparsit finds herself when Louisa is reported to have arrived at her father's house after leaving her husband's. We are also much amused by Bounderby's "windy anger" and boisterous manner. Bounderby's indignation merely arouses our mirth. He uses his favourite cliche when he says that the workers are so unreasonable as to demand "turtle soup and venison, with a gold spoon, and a coach and six." And he makes himself ridiculous by saying that his wife too demands these things which she will never get from him.

CHAPTER IV : LOST

A reward announced for Stephen's arrest. As the investigations into the bank robbery have so far yielded no result, and nothing has been heard of Stephen Blackpool or of the mysterious old woman who had been seen in his company, Bounderby now announces a reward of twenty pounds to anyone who will help in the arrest of Stephen Blackpool, the chief suspect in the case. The reward is announced through a number of placards which are put up on the factory-walls. Slackbridge, the union leader, finds it a golden opportunity to address the workers once again on the subject of Stephen's alleged betrayal of the workers' cause. Slackbridge, in his speech, describes Stephen as a thief, a plunderer, and a fugitive from justice. He congratulates the workers on their previous decision, which had been taken at Slackbridge's suggestion, to disown Stephen.

Rachel's disclosure to Bounderby. This public disgrace of Stephen greatly wounds the feelings of Rachel who now goes to Bounderby and not only claims that Stephen is innocent but tells him of the visit of his wife Louisa, and his brother-in-law Tom to Stephen's lodging two or three days before Stephen's departure from Coketown. As Bounderby cannot believe this story, he takes Rachel to the ailing Louisa, and Rachel demands from Louisa a confirmation of what Rachel has told Bounderby. Louisa confirms the account which Rachel has given to Bounderby of the visit she, accompanied by Tom, had paid to Stephen and the financial help she had offered to him. Although Rachel is now harbouring some suspicion regarding Louisa's motives in calling upon Stephen and offering financial help to him, Louisa, helped by Sissy, makes every possible effort to disabuse Rachel's mind of this kind of suspicion.

Stephen expected in two days' time. Rachel now tells Bounderby, in the presence of others, that she has already written to Stephen, whose whereabouts are known to her, to come and clear himself of the charges that have publicly been made against him. Rachel asserts that Stephen will be here in two days.

Stephen missing. Two days pass, but there is no sign of Stephen. Two more days pass, and there is still no sign of Stephen. On the fourth day, Rachel goes to Bounderby and shows him the letter which she had received from Stephen and which also contains Stephen's address. According to this address, Stephen had secured a job at a working colony about sixty miles away from Coketown. Bounderby sends messengers to that place in order to bring Stephen, but the messengers return with the news that immediately after receiving Rachel's letter, Stephen had left the place and that nobody knew where he was now. Six or seven more days pass, and still there is nó news of Stephen. Everybody wonders what has happened to the man.

Critical comments

The low character of Bounderby. Bounderby behaves exactly as a man of his kind was expected to behave. He feels perfectly certain that the robbery was committed by Stephen, and so he announces a reward for the arrest of Stephen. Dickens rightly describes Bounderby as "a remarkable man, and a self-made man, and a commercial wonder more admirable than Venus, who had risen out of the mud instead of the sea.*" In order to show that he is really remarkable and a commercial wonder, he maintains his public image intact without allowing the disaster of his private life to interfere with his conduct of business affairs. He also disbelieves

* According to the myth, Venus arose from the sea. The author ridicules Bounderby by saying that this man had arisen from mud. "Mud" refers not only to Bounderby's self-confessed humble origin but also to his dirty or wicked mind.

Rachel's account of Louisa's visit to Stephen, and this attitude is again to be expected of him. Louisa, however, confirms Rachel's account, though Bounderby remains totally unembarrassed by having been proved to be wrong in disbelieving Rachel's story.

Slackbridge's ludicrous rhetoric. Slackbridge, the union leader, is again the target of satire in this chapter. He is ridiculed for his extravagant oratory and his excessively rhetorical manner of speech in his condemnation of Stephen. Slackbridge speaks as if he were the workers' saviour and as if Stephen were the greatest villain on earth.

Rachel's fidelity to Stephen. Rachel's confidence in Stephen's integrity does not waver in spite of Stephen's failure to turn up as promised by him in his letter. Indeed, Rachel's confidence is quite touching. Rachel throws off all distrust "as a rock throws off the sea." She also defends Stephen for having changed his name when trying to get another job in another place. What could Stephen do under the circumstances, with the employers against him on one hand, and the workers against him on the other ? All that Stephen wanted was to work hard in peace. "Can a man have no soul of his own, no mind of his own ?" asks Rachel, and the situation is quite pathetic.

Tom's nervous behaviour. The behaviour of Tom lends colour to the suspicion which we have already formed, on the basis of Louisa's assessment of the case, that he is the real culprit. Tom remains at Bounderby's elbow all the time, and his state is thus described : "He was greatly excited, horribly fevered, bit his nails down to the quick, spoke in a hard rattling voice."

CHAPTER V : FOUND

Rachel's apprehension. Several more days pass, and there is still no news of Stephen Blackpool. Where was the man, and why did he not come back ? Rachel has still not lost her faith in Stephen. She tells Sissy, who has by now become quite intimate with her, that she has a feeling that someone has put Stephen to death, someone who might be exposed as the real criminal in case Stephen were to return and prove his innocence.

Country air suggested. Sissy suggests that Rachel should take a long walk in the fields away from Coketown in order to soothe her troubled mind. It is decided that both Rachel and Sissy will go on a walking trip through the countryside, away from Coketown, on the following Sunday.

Mrs. Sparsit's catching hold of an old woman. As Rachel and Sissy are walking through the street where Bounderby

lives, they see Mrs. Sparsit, in an agitated mood, commanding an old woman to come out of a carriage. Quite a crowd has collected because of the way Mrs. Sparsit is bullying the old woman. Mrs. Sparsit takes the old woman into Bounderby's house and tells Bounderby that she has been lucky enough to have succeeded in catching hold of the old woman who had been seen in Stephen's company outside the building of the bank, and who was suspected of being Stephen's accomplice.

Mrs Pegler, Bounderby's mother. On seeing the old woman, Bounderby flies into a rage and asks Mrs. Sparsit in a thundering voice why she is poking her nose into his family affairs. The old woman, who is now trembling, addresses Mr. Bounderby as "my dear darling boy" and says that she has not come here of her own accord, but that she has been brought here by force. It is evident from the words of this old woman, whom we know to be Mrs. Pegler, that she is Bounderby's mother.

The true facts of the case. Gradgrind, who happens to be in Bounderby's house at this time, scolds Mrs. Pegler for speaking to Bounderby in tones of tenderness and love when she had deserted Bounderby in his infancy and left him in the charge of a drunken grandmother. Mrs. Pegler is astonished to hear these charges. She calls Gradgrind a liar, saying that her mother had died even before her son Josiah was born and that she herself had brought up Josiah as best as she could, handicapped as she was by her extreme poverty. After Josiah had become a prosperous man, he had pensioned her off on thirty pounds a year, only making the condition that she was to remain in the countryside and never to trouble him or to make any claim that he was her son. Since then she had been coming to Coketown only once a year in order to take a look at her son from a distance.

Bounderby's admission of the facts. Bounderby does not deny this account given by Mrs. Pegler to Gradgrind in the presence of the entire crowd of people including Rachel and Sissy. All that Bounderby now says is that he is not bound to explain his family affairs to anyone. He then dismisses the crowd from his house. However, Mrs. Pegler is given a bed for that night at her son Josiah Bounderby's house.

The apprehension in the minds of Louisa and Sissy. Louisa and Sissy have now one common apprehension in their minds, though they have not spoken to each other about it. It is that Tom, whom they both suspect of being the real culprit, might have so manipulated things as to cause Spephen's death, so that Stephen's return should not lead to Tom's being identified as the man responsible for the robbery. Tom now hardly ever comes to his sister, but he still remains close to Bounderby, going with him everywhere like his shadow.

Criticl comments

Sissy's sympathy for Rachel. This chapter further develops Sissy's character. We have already known Sissy to be a very sympathetic and kind-hearted person. Sissy has now been feeling very troubled on Rachel's account. She has been meeting Rachel regularly and trying to offer all the comfort she could.

Bounderby exposed as a fraud. An important development, so far as the plot is concerned, is the astounding disclosure that Mrs. Pegler is Bounderby's mother and that the account of the circumstances of his birth and neglected childhood that Bounderby has been giving to everybody about himself at the slightest excuse is totally false. Bounderby stands exposed as a fraud, an impostor. He fabricated the story of having been abandoned by his mother and left to the charge of a drunken grandmother merely to be able to boast of his humble origin and his capacity to have risen, unaided, to a position of prosperity. He now cuts a most ridiculous figure. As the author says, "he could not have looked a bully more shorn and forlorn if he had had his ears cropped." Even Mrs Sparsit is not in so bad a plight as this self-made humbug Josiah Bounderby of Coketown.

Mrs. Sparsit an object of ridicule. Mrs. Sparsit too is an object of ridicule in this chapter. She thinks that, by having dragged Mrs. Pegler from her lodging in the country to Bounderby's house, she has done a great service to her employer. Actually, however, she becomes the unwitting instrument of her employer being completely exposed as a big liar and impostor. Mrs. Sparsit's discomfiture can better be imagined than described. Her over-enthusiasm lands her in great trouble. There is an irony in this situation in which Bounderby finds himself exposed through the over-officiousness of a person who wished to render some conspicuous service to him.. In short, both master and mistress find themselves in a completely unenviable position.

CHAPTER VI : THE STARLIGHT

Stephen's hat discovered lying on the edge of a deep chasm. In the course of their random walk through the fields, at a distance of many miles from Coketown, on the following Sunday, Rachel and Sissy find Stephen's hat lying crushed in the grass. Rachel takes this to mean that Stephen has been killed and that his dead body must be lying somewhere nearby. That hat seems to have been lying there for several days, because it is stained by rain and dew. Sissy says that she will explore the area around this spot, and she is in the act of stepping forward when Rachel catches hold of her with both hands and utters a loud scream. Before them, at their very feet, is the brink of a chasm hidden by the thick grass. They promptly move backwards and thank the good Lord for having saved them from falling into the chasm and getting killed.

A rescue party assembled by Rachel and Sissy. It is now evident to the two women that Stephen must have fallen down into this very chasm. It is possible that he may be lying dead somewhere at the bottom, but it is possible also that he may still be alive though badly hurt. In any case, they both realise the urgent need of summoning some help. They then run in different directions for aid and, after strenuous efforts, are able to bring a number of men to this spot. Sissy also sends a written message to Louisa about the discovery that has been made. In a couple of hours a regular crowd has gathered at the spot, and a surgeon has been brought to attend upon Stephen, should he be still alive.

Stephen's declaration of his innocence. It takes the rescue party more than four hours to find Stephen who is yet alive but whose body has been crushed by his fall into the chasm. He is now hardly able to move. He had fallen into the chasm while coming to Coketown in response to Rachel's letter in order to clear himself of Bounderby's charges. Some kind of restorative is administered to him and, as he sees Rachel, he smiles and says, "Ah Rachel it is all a muddle ! From first to last, a muddle." Stephen also says that he is perfectly innocent.

Stephen's dying words to Gradgrind. There seems to be no hope that Stephen will survive his injuries. Stephen says that he would like to speak to Gradgrind who is then brought to his side. Stephen tells him that he is innocent and that Gradgrind should speak to his son who is in a position to reveal the true circumstances of the robbery in the bank. A little later, while Stephen is being brought to Coketown, he dies.

Critical comments

Dramatic and moving narrative of events. This is a highly dramatic chapter. In the course of a walk, Rachel and Sissy come upon Stephen's hat and it leads to a sensational discovery of the accident that Stephen met when he was on his way to Coketown in order to clear himself of the charges that were published against him. The circumstances in which Stephen is rescued, though he does not survive long after the rescue, are also very dramatic and moving. Luckily, Stephen is able to clear himself before he expires. His words to Gradgrind, before his death, are very touching, and the concluding sentences of the chapter which tell us that the group of rescuers carrying Stephen to Coketown soon becomes a funeral procession are very pathetic.

The characters of the two women. Rachel's love for Stephen, of the genuineness and depth of which we are already aware, is here seen again in all its intensity On seeing Stephen's hat, Rachel naturally thinks that Stephen has been murdered

and the thought makes her frantic with grief. Sissy's solicitude on this occasion is also very great, because Sissy is now fully involved in what happens to Rachel and Stephen. Sissy's efforts to find men to come to Stephen's aid are really commendable and show the initiative that she is capable of taking in an emergency. Both Rachel and Sissy are faced with a crisis in this chapter, and they both acquit themselves well.

CHAPTER VII : WHELP-HUNTING

Tom disappears at Sissy's suggestion. When the dying Stephen was telling Gradgrind that the latter should question his son regarding the robbery at the bank, Sissy had promptly moved towards Tom and whispered a few words into his ears. After holding a very brief consultation with Sissy, Tom had then moved away from the scene and, within a few moments, vanished.

Gradgrind's distress. On the following day, Gradgrind goes to the bank in order to meet his son and question him on the subject of the bank robbery, but finds his son's chair empty. Gradgrind then goes home and locks himself in his room. He eats nothing all day and keeps walking to and fro in his room in a state of mental perturbation. He even refuses to talk to Louisa. Next morning, however, Gradgrind appears at breakfast at the usual time. Louisa tries to comfort him, but Gradgrind's distress is great. The thought that his own son committed the bank robbery, of which another man had been suspected, is unbearable to him.

Gradgrind's desperate desire to protect Tom. At the same time Gradgrind is desperately anxious that Tom should somehow be saved from the legal consequences of the crime he committed. Gradgrind would not mind spending a heavy amount of money to save Tom from arrest. Louisa then reveals to him that Sissy had warned Tom of the possibility of his arrest and that Tom had left the scene in time to save himself. Gradgrind feels very grateful to Sissy whose services to the family are already very great. Sissy tells Gradgrind that she had directed Tom to contact Mr. Sleary, the circus-owner and mention her name to him. Mr. Sleary was sure to give shelter to him.

Steps taken to ship Tom to some foreign land. It is now decided by Gradgrind in consultation with Louisa and Sissy to take steps to ship Tom to some foreign country from the port of Liverpool, that place being the closest to Mr. Sleary's present headquarters for his circus performances. In pursuance of this plan, all three of them set out to meet Tom at Mr. Sleary's circus, Louisa and Sissy going together by a different route, this precaution being taken so as not to arouse anybody's suspicion which would be inevitable if all the three were seen travelling together out of Coketown.

At Sleary's circus. In the meanwhile, Sleary's circus has moved to another town twenty miles off. Gradgrind, Louisa, and Sissy then continue their journey till they arrive at the new site of the circus. Mr. Sleary receives Sissy with great warmth and affection, and gives her all the circus news.

Tom in a ridiculous circus-livery. As had been anticipated by Sissy, Mr. Sleary is looking after Tom's safety in every possible way. Tom has been disguised as a member of the circus troupe and, at the moment, he is playing the role of a black-servant in one of the circus-acts. Gradgrind feels terribly depressed and disappointed to see one of his model children cutting a ridiculous figure in a comic circus-livery.

Tom's brazen admission of guilt. When Gradgrind asks Tom how and why he had committed the robbery, Tom replies that a certain percentage of people holding positions of trust are bound to prove dishonest aud that he was one of such persons. He had a duplicate key made of the safe in which money was kept and he had dropped that key in the morning of the day when the robbery was believed to have been committed, so that it might be supposed that the key had been used. Tom also explains that he had not taken all the money at once and that he had been stealing money in small sums from time to time. Gradgrind is shocked at his son's brazenness, and yet he must promptly take steps to send Tom out of the country. Tom is most willing to be sent abroad because he is feeling miserable in the circus. Gradgrind then gives him a letter to a friend in Liverpool and tells him to waste no time but to leave for Liverpool immediately and then board a ship sailing from there for some foreign land.

Bitzer's unexpected arival to catch hold of Tom. However, just when Tom is about to leave, Bitzer arrives. Bitzer is out of breath, as if he had been running, and his colourless face looks more colourless than ever before. Bitzer says that he had suspected Tom of the robbery long ago and that, having enough evidence against him now, he has lost no time in coming to catch hold of the culprit. Bitzer now takes possession of Tom, and holds him by the collar.

Critical comments

Sissy, an asset to Gradgrind. We once again see Sissy's character in a favourable light. But for the suggestion she gave to Tom just in time, Tom would have been arrested without much delay. Sissy is, indeed, an asset to Gradgrind who had taken her under his protection years ago.

Gradgrind's misfortune. Gradgrind appears in this chapter both in a favourable and in an unfavourable light. We

have already witnessed the failure of his system of education, and in this chapter we witness one more striking example of its failure. The irony of the situation is that Gradgrind's system recoils upon Gradgrind himself. When Tom defends himself by saying that he is only one of a number of people who are bound to prove dishonest in positions of trust, he is only making use of a theory that he has learnt from Gradgrind. And so Tom says : "I have heard you talk, a hundred times, of its being a law*. How can I help laws ? You have comforted others with such things, father. Comfort yourself." When Gradgrind sees Tom in a comic livery, his dismay is indescribable. The ruin of Louisa's married life has already come as a great blow to Gradgrind, and now an equally great blow comes to him when his son is found to be the culprit and has to flee from the country to save himself.

Gradgrind, a pathetic figure. Although Gradgrind is largely to blame for the way things have turned out, he does win our sympathy in this chapter, as he previously did when Louisa had come to him in a distraught condition. Gradgrind fully realises his mistake, and it is this realisation on his part that gives rise to the feeling of sympathy in our hearts. His appreciation of Sissy's faithfulness to the family is another reason why we sympathise with him. And then there is, of course, his paternal concern for Tom's safety. Bounderby, in his place, would have disowned his son.

Tom's ingratitude towards Louisa. Tom shows himself to be as contemptible a person now as he was before. Although he speaks to his father with a certain degree of respect, his attitude towards Louisa is extremely reprehensible. Far from feeling grateful to her for what she has been doing for his sake, he accuses her of having betrayed his trust by disclosing all the facts pertaining to her visit to Stephen when she had taken Tom with her. Louisa is greatly upset by Tom's attitude. She is moved to tears by his attitude and tells him that she loves him still and that one day he would be sorry to treat her in this manner.

The goodness of the circus people. Mr. Sleary is as interesting and as admirable in this chapter as he was when we met him earlier in the novel. His lisping manner of speach is quite amusing. His sheer goodness of heart and his recognition of human values in life mark him out from such persons as Bounderby and Mrs. Sparsit. He gives all possible assistance to Tom because of his love and affection for Sissy, and he does not make any fuss about the assistance that he renders. The other members of the circus troupe also receive their old pet Sissy with great affection. Indeed, these circus people represent the fundamental goodness of human nature, while the evil side, which is also fundamental in human nature, is represented by men like Tom and Bounderby.

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* namely, the theory that a certain percentage of persons are bound to prove dishonest.

CHAPTER VIII : PHILOSOPHICAL

Bitzer's determination to take Tom to Coketown. Bitzer is now bent upon taking Tom back to Coketown. Gradgrind appeals to Bitzer to let Tom flee, but Bitzer would not hear of any such thing. Bitzer proposes to hand over Tom to Bounderby who then will promote Bitzer to the very post which Tom had been holding. When Gradgrind reminds Bitzer that he had been educated under his supervision and he owes him a certain debt of gratitude for that reason, Bitzer says that he had been paying his fees for the education that he received. Self-interest should be the basic principle of a man's life, says Bitzer.

Mr. Sleary's stratagem and Tom's escape. Seeing the predicament of Gradgrind, Louisa, and Sissy, Mr. Sleary now quickly conceives a scheme by which he can still save Tom from Bitzer's clutches. He pretends to be on Bitzer's side and says that he will have Tom and Bitzer conveyed to the railway station by his own carriage because Tom, being the culprit, must face the law. However, when Tom and Bitzer are travelling by Mr. Sleary's carriage to the station, the trained circus-horse begins to dance at a signal from the carriage-driver and keeps dancing without moving an inch further, till Bitzer feels obliged to get down. One of the trained circus-dogs now takes charge of Bitzer and would not let Bitzer move a step in any direction. Taking advantage of this situation, Tom slips away.

No reward for Sleary necessary. Mr. Sleary then tells the story of how he has managed Tom's escape, and Gradgrind is overwhelmed by the service Mr. Sleary has rendered to him. Gradgrind offers any amount of money as a reward to Mr. Sleary, but the latter accepts nothing except a five-pound note for the carriage-driver, a collar for the dog, a set of bells for the horse, brandy and water for himself, and a little refreshment for the entire circus-company.

The death of Sissy's father. Mr. Sleary then tells Gradgrind in private that Sissy's father had died some time ago and that he had learned of the man's death when his dog called Merrylegs had one day come back to the circus in a very wretched condition and had, after wagging his tail for some time as if searching for Sissy, dropped on the ground and died.

Critical comments

Gradgrind hoist with his own petard. Gradgrind's philosophy of education once more recoils upon himself when Bitzer refuses to listen to his appeals. Bitzer argues that he must listen to the voice of reason and not to what his heart might have to say. The essential fallacy of Gradgrind's philosophy is exposed also when

Bitzer argues that he had paid the required fees for his schooling ; "My schooling was paid for—it was a bargain, and when I came away, the bargain ended." The author's comment on this is : "It was a fundamental principle of the Gradgrind philosophy that everything was to be paid for. Nobody was ever on any account to give anybody anything, or render anybody help without purchase. Gratitude was to be abolished, and the virtues springing from it were not to be." Gradgrind now finds himself a victim of his own philosophy when Bitzer is found to be completely devoid of the slightest tinge of gratitude towards the man in whose school he had received his education.

The comic episode of the rescue. We are once again filled with admiration for Mr. Sleary whose resourcefulness saves Tom from Bitzer's grip. The whole episode of the rescue, in which a circus-horse and a circus-dog play the major roles, though not in the arena of a circus, is most comic and most enjoyable. Mr. Sleary does not have a commercial attitude towards life, being completely free from the vice of greed. He politely declines Gradgrind's offer of money. Sleary's philosophy with which we are already acquainted, is repeated at the end of this chapter. He tells Gradgrind to make the best of the circus-people and not the worst. He says so, of course, in his own lisping manner.

The pathos of the death of Sissy's father. Mr. Sleary's account of the death of Sissy's father and the manner in which Merrylegs, the dog, conveys the fact of that death to the people in the circus, is quite touching. Sleary is considerate enough not to give this information to Sissy who continues to believe in her father's affection and to hope that he will one day come back to her.

CHAPTER IX : FINAL

Mrs. Sparsit's dismissal. Bounderby, greatly annoyed with Mrs. Sparsit for having brought his mother from a state of obscurity into the lime-light and for having thus disgraced him, now dismisses her from her post. Nor is Mrs. Sparsit sorry that she is dismissed. Before leaving him she tells him in unambiguous terms that she has always held him in great contempt and that she has often stood before his portrait and called him a "noodle".

Bounderby's death and his will. Five years later Josiah Bounderby of Coketown dies in a fit in the street. He leaves a will by which his estate is to pass into the hands of about twentyfive persons, each of them above the age of fiftyfive and each a humbug in his own right.

The change in Gradgrind. Gradgrind has now become a much wiser man, having realised the serious defects in the theories which he held in such a fanatical manner before misfortune descended upon him to falsify them. Now he understands that facts and

figures are not all-important, and that there are certain things higher than these: facts and figures must be made subservient to *faith, hope*, and *charity*. He exonerates the late Stephen Blackpool from the charge of robbery and publishes the guilt of his own son though, on account of his paternal affection for that rogue, he tries to extenuate his son's guilt.

Rachel lonely but cheerful. Rachel suffers from a long illness, and when she recovers she resumes her work at the factory : a woman of pensive beauty, always dressed in black, but sweet-tempered and serene and even cheerful. Her attitude towards Stephen's drunken wife, who is still alive, continues to be compassionate.

The sad fate of Tom. Tom Gradgrind, having lived far away from his native land almost as an exile, experiences the pangs of remorse. He realises his ingratitude to his sister who had lavished so much affection on him. He lives in the hope that he would meet her soon, but he dies prematurely of a fever, with the name of Louisa on his lips.

Sissy's happy married life. Sissy gets married and leads a happy life, giving birth to children who are fond of her and whom she loves with all a mother's love. Sissy's company is a great comfort to Louisa whose own life has proved a failure.

Critical comments

The exchange of sarcastic remarks between Bounderby and Mrs. Sparsit. This last chapter is remarkable chiefly for the brief scene between Bounderby and Mrs. Sparsit. Bounderby at last shows guts enough to dismiss Mrs. Sparsit and, in the process of dismissing her, gives evidence of his capacity for sarcasm. But it must be said to the credit of Mrs. Sparsit that she proves more than a match for Bounderby, and her capacity for sarcasm proves even greater. There is no longer any reason for her to hide her true opinion of this man whom she has always, previously in private, thought to be a "noodle". She looks at him with a contemptuous stare before she quits. She makes a triumphant exit ; there can be no doubt about. There is every reason for Bounderby to look crestfallen and to feel humiliated ; but we know that he is too thick-skinned a man to give even a moment's thought to the indignity to which he has been subjected by his dismissed housekeeper. A man who did not show any sign of embarrassment at the disclosures made by his mother would feel no shame now.

Moralizing tone. The other noteworthy feature of the last chapter is the moralising tone in which the ultimate destiny of each of the characters is indicated to us. The novel ends on a didactic note, giving to the book the quality of a moral fable. With the exception of Bounderby, each of the characters is the wiser and sadder for the experiences he or she has undergone, and the reader is wiser and sadder too.

18

The Mind and Character of Thomas Gradgrind

Gradgrind's educational theory based on facts. The novel opens with a statement by Gradgrind of his educational views. What he wants, he tells a new schoolmaster, is "facts". He instructs the new schoolmaster to teach his class of boys and girls nothing but facts, because facts alone are wanted in life. He exhorts the schoolmaster to root out everything from the minds of his pupils and to plant only the facts there. The minds of human beings, who may be described as reasoning animals, can be formed only upon facts ; nothing else can ever be of any service to these young minds. "Stick to facts, sir," says Gradgrind to the new schoolmaster. Gradgrind speaks these words with great emphasis, and this emphasis is greatly helped by the speaker's physical appearance and features.

A comic description of Gradgrind's physical appearance. Gradgrind has a forehead which looks like a square wall, with his eyebrows serving as its base ; his eyes are like two dark caves overshadowed by the square wall of the forehead ; his mouth is wide, thin, and hard-set; his voice is inflexible, dry, and dictatorial. In fact, the author gives us at the very outset a comic description of Gradgrind's physical appearance which, we are told, reinforces the emphasis with which he speaks : "The speaker's obstinate carriage, square coat, square legs, square shoulders—nay, his very neckcloth, trained to take him by his throat with an unaccommodating grasp, like a stubborn fact, as it was—all helped the emphasis."

Gradgrind, a target of satire. It is evident, from the very beginning, that Gradgrind is intended to be a target of satire in the novel. His over-emphasis on "facts" indicates that. "In this life, we want nothing but facts, sir, nothing but facts," says he to the new schoolmaster. A little later, Gradgrind is described as a man of realities, a man of facts and calculations, a man who proceeds upon the principle that two and two are four, and

nothing over. Gradgrind keeps a rule, a pair of scales, and a multiplication table always in his pocket, ready to weigh and measure any human being ("any parcel of human nature"), and tell you exactly what he comes to. The judgment of a human being is to Gradgrind a mere question of figures, a case of simple arithmetic. He looks upon the boys and girls in the class-room as little vessels or pitchers who are to be filled to the brim with facts.

Suggestive of a grindstone. The very name "Gradgrind" suggests the harshness and inflexibility of a grindstone. Inflexibility and an obsession with factual knowledge based upon statistics go naturally together in Dickens's thinking. In the course of the novel (Book II, Chapter II) we find Dickens referring to the utilitarian political economists as the "Hard Fact fellows". In a letter, Dickens explained the satire of this novel as directed against "those who see figures and averages, and nothing else—the representatives of the wickedest and most enormous vice of this time". In Gradgrind, Dickens was attacking, not contemporary industrialism, but the utilitarian political economy of the time. Gradgrind's inflexibility and harshness combine with the kind of intellect which deals in facts and figures. He seeks to measure the universe with a pair of compasses, and he fails to profit from an early shock outside Sleary's circus, while Mrs. Gradgrind suggests on her death-bed that something is lacking in her children's education, something (but not an "ology" at all) which her husband has missed or forgotten.

Girl Number Twenty: and the definition of a horse. Gradgrind's emphasis on facts receives a comic illustration when he addresses one of the pupils in the classroom as "girl number twenty" and, then goes on to express his disapproval of her father's calling her "Sissy" instead of Cecilia. He next asks her to define a horse and, when she fails, feels almost jubilant when the boy Bitzer defines a horse in accordance with certain facts, as Gradgrind would have liked the pupils in his school to define that animal. We feel greatly amused when he says to Sissy after Bitzer has given his definition: "Now girl number twenty, you know what a horse is." Gradgrind also agrees with the government officer who exhorts the pupils never to fancy but always to keep facts before them. Gradgrind indeed thinks that the school he is running is a model institution. He intends every pupil in this school to be a model.

Gradgrind's home and his children. Gradgrind brings up his own children strictly in accordance with his theory of education which has its basis in facts and nothing but facts. He has five children, and he thinks each one of them to be a model. The house, called Stone Lodge, which he has built for himself and his family, is a "matter-of-fact home, a calculated, balanced, and proved house" with a certain number of windows on this side and an equal number on the other side, with a lawn, a garden, an avenue,

"all ruled straight like a botanical account-book." His children have been allotted separate cabinets for separate branches of knowledge. They have a little conchological* cabinet, a little metallurgical cabinet, a little mineralogical cabinet, and so on.

"Eminently practical". Gradgrind is an affectionate father, in his own way, but he would probably have described himself as an "eminently practical" father. He takes a particular pride in the phrase "eminently practical." Whatever the occasion for a public meeting in Coketown, somebody or the other is sure to refer to Gradgrind as an "eminently practical" man, and such a reference always pleases Gradgrind because he thinks that he richly deserves the compliment.

His children not allowed to indulge in fancies or to wonder at anything. In accordance with his theory of education, he has always discouraged his eldest child, Louisa, from indulging in any "fancies." He has in fact even been urging her never "to wonder." He believes that everything should be settled by means of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. He is opposed to the cultivation of the sentiments, the affections, the imagination, and the capacity to wonder. None of his children has therefore ever seen a face in the moon. None of his children has ever learnt the nursery rhyme: "Twinkle, twinkle, little star; How I wonder what you are." None of his children has ever been allowed to wonder so far as the stars are concerned, having been duly taught all the necessary facts of astronomy.

A satirical description of his membership of Parliament. It is Gradgrind's ambition to become a member of Parliament. In a satirical tone the author tells us that Gradgrind was "now looking about for a suitable opportunity of making an arithmetical figure in Parliament." And his ambition is fulfilled. His membership of Parliament is also satirically described. He becomes, says the author, one of the representatives of the multiplication table, one of the respected members for ounce-weights and measures, and so on. Later his work as a member of Parliament is again described in an ironical manner. He was, says the author, "usually sifting and sifting at his parliamentary cinder-heap in London, and was still hard at it in the national dust-yard."**

His argument in favour of Louisa marrying Bounderby. The manner in which Gradgrind obtains his daughter's consent to marry Bounderby is a triumph of his practical philosophy based on facts and divorced from imagination and emotions. To him the disparity between the ages of Louisa and Bounderby, the would-be bridegroom being fifty and the would-be bride only twenty, is no serious matter. On the basis of statistics, which he

* Conchology is the study of shells.

**Page 196 of the novel,

has closely studied, he has come to the conclusion that this kind of disparity is quite common and, therefore, not be regarded as a bar to the proposed marriage between his own daughter and his elderly friend. He is completely impervious to Louisa's irony when she speaks of his confining himself rigidly to facts and asking her to marry Bounderby because of the sanction provided by facts which must overrule all other considerations. As the author tells us, Gradgrind "with his unbending, utilitarian, matter-of-fact voice." goes on asking Louisa relentlessly what her decision in the matter is, not realising at all that he is hardly giving her any option.

The thick-skinned, heartless man. Gradgrind almost exults over what Louisa intends to be regarded as a grievance, namely that she has been so brought up that she never dreamed a child's dream, never had a child's belief or a child's fear. He certainly goes so far out of his way as to ask her if she has ever entertained in secret any other proposal of marriage. But, as he himself says, he is merely discharging his duty in asking this question. We can be sure that, even if Louisa had been harbouring any other proposal, Gradgrind would have found some method of driving out any such illusion from her mind, "eminently practical" as he is. The heartless, thick-skinned, almost callous attitude, that he adopts in this interview with his daughter, certainly does not go to his credit.

His unemotional relationship with his wife. Gradgrind's attitude towards his wife shows the same lack of feeling. He has a mechanical, routine relationship with his wife who, even when she feels some kind of mental excitement, quickly subsides when he looks at her. Under the influence of that "wintry piece of fact," nobody can be allowed to feel any emotional excitement. When his wife dies, he is in London, and he comes back from there, returning thither immediately after burying her in a business-like manner. This is how the author describes Gradgrind's return to London to resume his parliamentary activities after the burial: "He then returned with promptitude to the national cinder-heap, and resumed his sifting for the odds and ends he wanted, and his throwing of the dust about into the eyes of other people who wanted other odds and ends—in fact resumed his parliamentary duties".

Essentially kind-hearted. In spite of his utilitariansm and his excessive devotion to facts, Gradgrind is at bottom, and essentially, a kind-hearted man. The author himself makes the following observation about him: "Mr. Gradgrind though hard enough, was by no means so rough a man as Mr. Bounderby. His character was not unkind, all things considered; it might have been a very kind one indeed, if he had only made some round mistake in the arithmetic that balanced it, years ago." In other words, his basic kindness lies crushed beneath the kind of education and training he has received. Still, this basic kindness does assert itself

when occasion demands. For instance, he takes Sissy under his protection as soon as it is discovered that her father has run away, abandoning her to fend for herself. And he takes her home, in spite of Bounderby's opposition. Subsequently, although adverse reports come from the school regarding Sissy's progress, he recognises certain merits which the girl has, and he always treats her with sympathy and kindness.

His reaction to the utter failure of Louisa's marriage. Gradgrind is not incapable of improvement and reform. In fact, his character develops and registers a change in keeping with the change in circumstances. He is quick to realise the blunders that he has been committing, and his outlook upon life is greatly modified by the domestic disasters which result from the kind of training that he has given to his children and from the educational system according to which he ran his school. The first disappointment that he met was, of course, seeing two of his children, Louisa and Tom, peeping through the tenthole to catch a glimpse of the circus performers inside. He had never expected his own children to feel inquisitive and thus to defy his directions to them. However, this discovery had meant little to him at the time, and had not interrupted the kind of education that he was giving to his children and to the pupils at school. The real crisis of his life comes when he is confronted by his daughter Louisa who has run away from her husband's home, undecided whether to cast her lot with her lover Harthouse or not. Gradgrind now accepts full responsibility for Louisa's marriage having proved a complete failure and for his own shortsightedness in not having taken human feelings and sentiments into consideration in such an important matter as marriage. The way he offers his regret to Louisa makes him almost a pathetic creature, and we do certainly feel a good deal of sympathy for him, because of the genuineness and intensity of his repentance. He now adopts a bold stand towards Bounderby and sticks to his position even when Bounderby gives him an ultimatum.

His reaction to the other domestic disaster. But Gradgrind's misfortune does not end here. He receives another blow on discovering that his son Tom is the real culprit in the matter of the robbery at Bounderby's bank. Tom's irresponsible way of life climaxing in the bank-robbery is another proof of the defective educational theory that Gradgrind has been implementing with such vigour. Again, he shows his essential humanity and kind-heartedness when he does everything in his power to protect Tom against the legal consequences of his crime. Gradgrind the affectionate father here once again wins a victory over Gradgrind the academician and theoretician. However, he proves himself to be a man of integrity also, because he duly publishes the fact of Stephen's innocence and his own son Tom's responsibility for the bank-robbery.

His realization of the value of faith, hope, and charity. Eventually, as the author tells us, Gradgrind greatly modifies his views and his outlook on life. He now understands the need to bend his inflexible theories to the exigencies of circumstances and situations. He now makes his "facts and figures" subservient to "faith, hope, and charity," and no longer grinds these divine virtues in his dusty mills. Thus by the time the novel ends we have developed an attitude of respect towards this gray-haired and now decrepit old man.

19

The Mind and Character of Josiah Bounderby

Rich, and devoid of sentiment. Like Gradgrind, Josiah Bounderby is "a man perfectly devoid of sentiment". He is described as a rich man : "banker, merchant, manufacturer, and what not." He is "a big, loud man, with a stare, and a metallic laugh." He is a man "made out of a coarse material", a man with a puffed head and forehead, a man with a pervading appearance on him of being inflated like a balloon. He is a year or two younger than his eminently practical friend, Thomas Gradgrind, being fortyseven or fortyeight years old. He does not have much hair on his head. One might imagine that he has "talked his hair off." What is left of his hair stands up in disorder, being constantly blown about by his windy boastfulness.

"The bully of humility". As indicated above, Bounderby is a boastful man. However, he is in the habit of boasting of something which other people would like to hide. What he boasts of is his humble origin. He is proud of the fact that his parents were extremely poor and belonged to the lowest stratum of society, and that he has risen to his position of prosperity by dint of his own efforts and exertions. He is almost aggressive in his boastfulness in this respect, and is, for this reason, described by the author as "the bully of humility."

The circumstances of his early life. When we meet Bounderby first, it is his birthdy and he is speaking to Mrs. Gradgrind in Stone Lodge, and boasting, as is his habit, of his humble birth and the efforts by which he rose to his present position despite his many handicaps. He did not have "a shoe to his foot", he says. "As to a stocking, he did not know such a thing by name." He passed his days as a child in a ditch, and his nights in a pigsty. For years, he tells Mrs. Gradgrind, he was one of the most miserable little wretches ever seen ; he was so sickly that he was always moaning and groaning. As for his mother, she abandoned him when he

was still a child, leaving him to his grandmother who, in addition to being a heavy drunkard, was the wickedest and the worst old woman that ever lived. As soon as he was big enough, he ran away and became a vagabond. A vagabond, an errand-boy, a labourer, a porter, a clerk, a chief manager, a small partner : this is what he was as a boy and as a young man till he attained his present position as Josiah Bounderby of Coketown. Bounderby does not believe in concealing the facts of his life. As has already been said, he is proud of these facts, and he proclaims them whenever he gets an opportunity to do so.

Devoid of sympathy. As already pointed out, Bounderby is not a sentimental person at all. That is the reason why he is opposed to Gradgrind's taking Sissy under his protection when it is found that Sissy's father has run away and forsaken her. He keeps Sissy for one night in his own house, in order to enable Gradgrind to think over the matter and, if possible, to give up his intention to take charge of Sissy as her guardian. When it is found that Louisa has somehow got interested in the performances at the circus, Bounderby suggests that Sissy should be expelled from the school because it must be owing to Louisa's contact with Sissy that Louisa became interested in the circus.

Arrogant towards workmen. As a manufacturer and factory owner, Bounderby adopts an arrogant attitude towards the workmen and does not feel the least sympathy for them in their troubles or in their desire for a better life. He always expresses the view that these workmen want "to ride in a coach drawn by six horses and to be fed on turtle soup and venison, with a gold spoon". His treatment of the workmen shows a mechanical mind ; he looks upon the workmen as so many hundred "hands", so many hundred horse steam power.

Callous attitude towards Stephen. The manner in which he deals with Stephen fully illustrates his contempt and his utter lack of sympathy for the workmen. He does not try to understand the suffering that Stephen has undergone and is still undergoing on account of his unhappy marriage. He reminds Stephen that he took his wife for better and for worse. When Stephen points out that he is aware of cases in which men belonging to the upper classes have been able to get rid of undesirable wives, Bounderby tells him that the procedure by which a man can divorce his wife is very costly and complicated, and that he should not think in those terms at all. When Stephen refuses to act as an informer against the workers' union, Bounderby dismisses him as a man who will create trouble wherever he happens to be. Instead of appreciating Stephen's stand, Bounderby fires him and sticks to his decision even though Stephen says that, after losing this job, he is not likely to get another anywhere. Later, Bounderby is quick to believe that

Stephen has committed the robbery at his bank. In fact, he feels cocksure on this point and offers a reward to anyone who will help in the arrest of Stephen. In short, Bounderby's attitude towards Stephen throughout is most callous and inhuman.

A stupid husband ; his self-conceit and vanity. As a husband, Bounderby proves to be equally callous. In the first place he should never have married Louisa who was nearly thirty years younger than he. Having married her, he hardly knows how he should treat her. His attitude towards her is almost the same as his attitude towards the workmen in his pay. After being informed by Gradgrind that Louisa has consented to marry him, Bounderby makes love to her in the form of bracelets* ; and on all occasions during the period of his betrothal his love-making takes "a manufacturing aspect." As the author tells us, "the business was all facts, from first to last." In other words, Bounderby adopts a matter-of-fact attitude towards Louisa, never once bothering to find out if Louisa has any feelings and sentiments. He takes it for granted that Louisa will remain faithful to him as a wife, because he is "Josiah Bounderby of Coketown". When he introduces James Harthouse to his wife, he gives him complete freedom to meet her whenever he likes and pay her any number of compliments he pleases, because he himself has never paid a compliment to his wife. He is "Josiah Bounderby of Coketown", and that is enough for him. Manners and social position have no importance in his eyes, though they may be important in the eyes of his wife, he tells Harthouse. When he finds that Louisa has run away from him, he feels shocked that such an important man as he should thus be treated by his wife. Never once does it occur to him that he may have been negligent as a husband or that he may have ignored his wife's feelings. He does not even have the common sense to realise that Gradgrind's suggestion that Louisa should be allowed to remain at her father's house for a few days in order to recover her mental equilibrium has much to recommend it. On the contrary, he gives an ultimatum to Gradgrind, as a consequence of which he loses his wife for ever, and has to resume a bachelor's life.

Proud of the aristocratic background of his housekeeper. Bounderby's relations with Mrs. Sparsit are very important in any consideration of his character. He is proud of the fact that he has as his housekeeper a lady with an aristocratic background. In this connection, the author makes the following observation about him : "Just as it belonged to his boastfulness to depreciate his extraction, so it belonged to it to exalt Mrs. Sparsit's." In other words, he boasts of Mrs. Sparsit's aristocratic connections just as he boasts of his humble background. To Mrs. Sparsit, he always speaks without reserve, and he is always solicitous about her comfort and well-being. He is very particular that every-

* that is, he tries to please her with costly gifts only.

one should show to Mrs. Sparsit the deference which, according to him, she is entitled to. For instance, he tells Stephen that Mrs. Sparsit is a born lady, a high lady, and that he should be careful about the language that he uses to express himself in her presence.

His misjudgment with regard to his housekeeper. He is shrewd enough to know that Mrs. Sparsit would be shocked to learn that he has decided to marry Louisa ; he even thinks that she may faint and so he buys a bottle of smelling-salts when he goes home with the news. It is another matter that, far from swooning, Mrs. Sparsit listens to the news with perfect composure. Knowing full well that Mrs. Sparsit would not be able to adjust herself to the new position, he makes the sensible suggestion that a born-and-bred lady like her would feel happier if she were to move from his house to the bank where all the amenities to which she is entitled would be provided to her. Indeed, it is surprising that Bounderby continues to show to Mrs. Sparsit the courtesy she could hardly have received from any other employer. For instance, on one occasion, he says to her : "Mrs. Sparsit, in point of high connections, you are on a level with the aristrocracy."

His dismissal of his housekeeper. And yet the time comes when Bounderby finds it absolutely necessary to get rid of this woman. He speaks somewhat roughly to her, for the first time, when he finds that the news she brought to him regarding his wife's elopement is incorrect. Disregarding her tears on the occasion, he hustles her into a fast train without offering any refreshment to her apart from watering her face and putting some salt into her mouth. Later, when she disgraces him by bringing Mrs. Pegler to his house, he decides to dispense with the services of Mrs. Sparsit, and actually dismisses her. It is another matter that, even on this occasion, she proves more than a match for him and that she accepts even her dismissal in a most condescending manner. She leaves him with no apparent regret and, before she goes, she informs him that she has always thought him a "noodle."

A fraud, and a thick-skinned person. Bounderby is exposed as a perfect fraud when it is found that he had never been abandoned as a child by his mother and had never been left in the charge of a drunken grandmother. Mrs. Pegler, his mother, stoutly defends herself against the charge that she had abandoned her son Josiah. As for his grandmother, she had actually died before Josiah was even born. And yet Bounderby does not feel in the least embarrassed when he finds himself publicly exposed. On the contrary, he tells the crowd of people who have assembled at his house that he does not think it necessary to deliver a lecture to them on his family affairs. On this occasion, we recall an earlier incident when he was snubbed by Mr. Childers and his assistant Master Kidderminster and when, too, he had remained unembarrassed. He is indeed a very thick-skinned person.

His misjudgment of Stephen and Rachel. It does him no credit at all that he readily believes the charge of robbery against Stephen and continues to believe it till it is established that Stephen was innocent. He even disbelieves Rachel's story that Mrs. Bounderby had paid Stephen a visit two or three days before Stephen's departure from Coketown. He believes Rachel's account of this visit only when Louisa herself confirms it. Even on this occasion, he feels no embarrassment at all when he finds that he was wrong in disbelieving Rachel's version.

His death. In the concluding chapter of the novel we learn that Josiah Bounderby of Coketown ultimately dies of a fit in a street in Coketown. The news of the death of this odious, hateful man does not produce the least regret in our minds. We are also told that the will he left gave rise to many conflicting claims.

II

Ruskin thought Bounderby overdrawn, and there is possibly a miscalculation in making him "as near being Mr. Gradgrind's bosom friend as a man perfectly devoid of sentiment can approach that spiritual relationship towards another man perfectly deviod of sentiment" (Book I Chaptar IV). Yet this is the mark of how far Gradgrind has tortured his own humanity ; and there is nothing inconceivable in the mindless extreme of Bounderby's "rugged individualism" : England was full of Bounderbys (and still is). He is, of course, at the root of his bullying, a fraud : in the world of facts in which he pretends to live, his vaunted image of the self-made man is based on a mean and corrupt fancy—a piece of grim but peculiarly apt irony, for he represents the extreme of insensitivity to the claims of humanity, a grossly coarsened expression of the self-centredness which is a fundamental principle of Gradgrindery and finds different forms in Bitzer, Tom, and Mrs. Sparsit, all offshoots of the system which deliberately excludes the outgoing human emotions of love and gratitude (all that Sissy stands for). Bounderby has a crucial role in the development of the plot ; and he is also vital as the dominant expression of the domineering un-generosity of spirit which has made Coketown what it is—a town as hideous and corrupting in its larger human relations as it is in its murderous physical depression of the individual human spirit. But Bounderby also acts as a kind of objectification of the logical conclusion of the Gradgrind system, the abstract given concrete expression : this is what it comes to in the end, just as the wrecks of Tom's and Louisa's lives are by-products of its destructive passage through the world.

20

The Midn and Character of Louisa

A girl with a starved imagination. When we first meet Louisa, she is a girl of fifteen or sixteen. She is described as being pretty, and as a person who would be self-willed but for her bringing up. Mr. Gradgrind, her father, sees to it that her imagination and emotions do not develop, because he is a believer in facts, and only facts. In the author's own words, Louisa has a "starved imagination".

Her strong dislike for Bounderby. Although she is only fifteen or sixteen when we meet her first, Mr. Bounderby already has his eyes upon her as his would-be wife. He feels attracted towards her, and being a regular visitor at Mr. Gradgrind's house, has many opportunities of talking to the girl. When she is caught by her father peeping through a tent-hole, in order to take a look at the circus performance in the arena, in the company of her brother Tom, it is Bounderby who defends her and later claims a kiss for the favour he has done to her. "Always my pet." he says to her on this occasion. After he has departed, Louisa keeps rubbing her cheek with her handkerchief for several minutes in order to wipe off the kiss because she does not have the least liking for this man. In fact, she dislikes him so much that she would not mind if the part of the cheek where Bounderby planted his kiss were to be cut out by Tom with his pen-knife.

Unhappy girlhood. Louisa is extremely unhappy, like her brother, in her house because of the manner in which all kinds of restraints are imposed upon her and Tom by their father. Tom says that he is sick of his life, and Louisa too shares this feeling. None of Gradgrind's children is allowed to "imagine" things or to "wonder" at things or to have any feelings of curiosity. She often sits wondering at the kind of life she is leading, though she is not allowed to wonder. Sometimes she sits looking at the fire, because she has nothing else to do.

Her deep affection for Tom. In judging the character of Louisa, we have to examine her relations with, and her attitude to,

five persons—her brother Tom, her father Mr. Gradgrind, her husband Mr. Bounderby, James Harthouse, and Sissy. She has a great affection for her brother Tom and it is partly for the sake of his career that she agrees to marry Bounderby whom she otherwise hates with all her heart. When Tom needs money because of his gambling habits, she goes to the extent of selling some of her trinkets to help him out of his troubles. It is only when he needs a very large amount of money that she refuses him. But even then she feels a genuine affection for him, and when she suspects him of having committed the robbery at the bank, she does her best to draw a confession from him in order to be able to help him if possible, so that he may not get into trouble. Indeed her affection for her brother Tom is one of the most striking facts of her life. Harthouse is rather surprised to see that it is only the sight of Tom that brings a smile to her lips and a ray of light into her eyes.

Her attitude to her father. Louisa has a lot of respect for her father in spite of the fact that she is opposed to the manner in which he has brought her up. When he proposes that she should marry Mr. Bounderby, she knows that her father is doing a great injustice to her, and yet she does not defy him on this occasion. As has already been indicated above, she partly agrees to marry Bounderby for the sake of her brother Tom, but mainly because her father desires this alliance. The conversation that takes place between her and her father on this occasion, when he conveys Bounderby's wish to her, throws a lot of light on both father and daughter. She frankly tells him that she has no choice in the matter and, as for her having any preference in the matter, she says : "What do I know, father, of tastes and fancies, of aspirations and affections ? The baby-preference that even I have heard of as common among children, has never had its innocent resting-place in my breast. You have been so careful of me that I never had a child't heart. You have trained me so well that I never dreamed a child's dream. You have dealt so wisely with me, father, from my cradle to this hour, that I never had a child's belief or a child's fear." This speech is full of bitterness and irony. It is another matter that her father fails to comprehend her talk or understand the irony behind her words.

The great crisis in her life. When she finds herself facing the greatest crisis of her life, she rushes home to her father and tells him of her predicament. She reminds him of the way he brought her up, suppressing her emotions, inhibiting her natural aspirations, stifling her sensibilities, and rendering her incapable of behaving in a manner in which any normal girl would behave. She reminds him of how he prevailed upon her to get married to a man whom she never loved, though she admits that one of her motives in marrying that man was her desire to promote her brother Tom's prospects in life. At the same time, because she still loves her father, she tells him that she has not come to reproach him or to make any

complaint to him. She has come to him for help in a situation in which she herself does not know what to do. She tells him that she is almost in love with another man who wants to take her away, and she seeks her father's help in saving her from taking such a step. This interview of Louisa with her father is also one of the highlights of the story, like her previous interview when he had prevailed upon her to marry Bounderby. A feeling of deep sympathy for Louisa is aroused in our minds when she thus speaks to her father now: "This minute he (that is, Harthouse) expects me, for I could release myself of his presence by no other means. I do not know that I am sorry, I do not know that I am ashamed, I do not know that I am degraded in my own esteem. All that I know is, father, your philosophy and your teaching will not save me. Now, father you have brought me to this. Save me by some other means." Saying these words, she collapses and sinks to the ground in an insensible state. It could even be argued that the height of pathos in this story is reached, not in the incident of Stephen's death, but at this point.

Her relations with her husband. Louisa has disliked Bounderby ever since her childhood. She marries him because of mixed motives. Firstly, her father conveys Bounderby's proposal to her in such a manner that she is left in no doubt about her father's intention in this respect. Gradgrind almost argues her into agreeing to the proposed marriage. When she asks her father what advice he has to give her in this matter, he replies that she should consider this question, as she has been accustomed to consider every other question, simply as one of "tangible facts", and then he goes on to talk of "statistics" to show that cases of young girls marrying much older men are fairly common. Bred on her father's utilitarian philosophy, Louisa has not the heart to refuse him now. There is, besides, a strong desire in her heart to push her brother in life, and she thinks that she will be able to do so by becoming the wife of her brother's employer. After the marriage, she remains faithful to Bounderby till Harthouse appears on the scene, and even then she does not deviate from the path of wifely virtue in spite of Harthouse's importunities. There is only one episode in the novel when we are witnesses to a tiff between Louisa and her husband, and even then the fault is not that of Louisa.

Her relations with Harthouse. Louisa does certainly feel attracted towards Harthouse because of his "smooth manners" and his "assumed honesty in dishonesty." She feels somewhat drawn towards him because he speaks like a man who seems to be free from all kinds of pretensions and hypocrisy. Then she feels drawn towards him because he seems to take a lot of interest in her brother for whom she has undoubtedly a soft corner. She is not clever or shrewd enough to see through the kind of strategy Harthouse is employing in order to win her heart. Perhaps the strongest reason why she feels drawn towards him is that she is leading a loveless life,

having been yoked to a husband who was thrust upon her. But it must be said to the credit of Louisa that, in spite of the subtle ways in which Harthouse has been trying to acquire a hold upon her affections, she does not just fall into his arms when he declares his love for her in ardent and impassioned tones. She says neither yes nor no to him, because she is herself undecided. She is torn between the claims of the heart and the claims of the conscience. Without any loss of time she sets out from her house to seek help and guidance from her father in this critical situation. She has succeeded in resisting the temptation and she thus shows herself to be a woman of great integrity.

Her relations with Sissy. In the beginning Louisa is quite friendly with Sissy. But when Sissy looks dismayed by Louisa's agreeing to marry Bounderby, Louisa feels upset, and from this moment onwards keeps Sissy at a distance. This rigid attitude of Louisa once again changes into friendliness and affection when she finds Sissy attending upon her in her sickness with great tenderness and affection. We can be sure that from this time onwards, Louisa has accepted Sissy as her best friend in the world.

Her sympathy for Stephen. In spite of the utilitarian principles which have governed her upbringing, Louisa has not lost all natural feelings. Apart from the love that she bears to Tom, and apart from the affection that she develops for Sissy, there is also the sympathy that she shows to Stephen when she finds that her husband has dismissed him unjustly. She personally goes to Stephen's lodgings and not only speaks words of comfort but offers liberal financial help to him. When, subsequently, Rachel's version of Louisa's visit to Stephen is disbelieved by Bounderby, Louisa readily offers the required confirmation.

A most likable person. On the whole, this reserved kind of girl, with her simple dignity, quiet manners, rare self-control, and delicate conscience, is one of the most likable persons in the novel, and we keep thinking of her long after we have finished reading the story.

21

The Mind and Character of James Harthouse

An odious character. Next to Bounderby and Mrs. Sparsit, James Harthouse is the most odious character in the novel. In spite of his boredom with life in general, he seems to be quite a shrewd type of person, with sufficient understanding of human nature, and something of a strategist. In the light of his behaviour in the novel, he may indeed be regarded as one of the villains in the story.

Lazy, weary, indifferent, and yet very shrewd. When we meet him first, he is described as a very well dressed man, seemingly indifferent to everything around him, and not much moved by what happens or by what anybody says. The author ironically refers to him as "a thorough gentleman made to the model of the time—weary of everything and putting no more faith in anything than Lucifer." His conversation with Mrs. Sparsit, whom he approaches for information regarding the whereabouts of the banker Bounderby, reveals much of his character. He tries to ingratiate himself with Mrs. Sparsit by paying her the customary compliments which are paid to a woman, though he evidently does not mean any of them. From this conversation we also learn his capacity to extract information of the kind he needs from those whom he meets. The author refers to the "lightness and smoothness" of his manner of speaking which is quite pleasant. Without seeming to be inquisitive, he finds out from Mrs. Sparsit that, far from being forty or thirtyfive years of age, Mrs. Bounderby was hardly twenty at the time of her marriage. His general deportment is lazy, indolent, and weary.

A new recruit in the cause of "Hard Facts." James Harthouse has tried life in various fields, and has found every activity that he pursued to be a bore. He has been in the army; he has travelled to Jerusalem; he has gone yachting about the world; but he felt interested in nothing. Eventually, at the suggestion of his brother, he agrees to join the band of "Hard Fact fellows" who

are interested in statistics and things of that kind and one of whose chief representatives, Gradgrind, is known to Harthouse's brother. It is in pursuance of this plan that Harthouse arrives in Coketown to meet Bounderby with a letter of introduction from Gradgrind in order to make himself known in this part of the country and to spread the gospel of the Gradgrind party In other words, when he arrives in Coketown, he is a spokesman for the Gradgrind school of thought ; he is a new recruit apprenticed to the "Hard Fact" cause.

"What will be, will be". According to his own statement made in the course of a conversation with Louisa, this man attaches not the least importance to his opinions. As a result of the various kinds of boredom he has gone through, he has come to the conclusion that any set of ideas will be just as useful as any other set or as harmful as any other set. The only truth in which he believes is the Italian motto : "What will be, will be." This motto he repeats several times in the course of the story.

His "assumed honesty in dishonesty". Another noteworthy point about his attitude to life is his "assumed honesty in dishonesty". In other words, he believes that one should frankly admit that the world is ruled by dishonesty. The author describes this attitude of mind as the "most effective and most patronised of the polite deadly sins. In the prevailing atmosphere of the time, the not being troubled with earnestness was a grand point in his favour." That was the reason why he took to the Hard Fact fellows with as good a grace as if he had been born one of the tribe. The following observation that he makes in the course of another conversation with Louisa is significant : "The only difference between us (the Hard Fact fellows) and the professors of virtue or benevolence or philanthropy is that we know it is all meaningless and say so, while they know it equally and still never say so." In other words, members of all other groups, beside the Hard Fact group, are hypocrites.

Tackling Mrs. Sparsit, and then Tom. Apart from what has been stated above, the character of this man hinges upon the development of his relationship with Louisa. The author tells us that in the beginning Harthouse had no clear design in his mind with regard to Louisa. But in actual fact we begin to suspect his design as soon as he cleverly tries to elicit some information regarding the age and temperament of Louisa from his talk with Mrs. Sparsit on the first day of his arrival in Coketown. This suspicion is confirmed when, after a few days of his acquaintance with Louisa, he begins to think that it would be a new sensation if Louisa's face were to brighten at the sight of him just as it now brightens at the sight of her brother Tom. It is evident that he proposes to start a flirtation with Louisa if he can somehow tackle her. Finding that Louisa has a soft corner for her brother Tom, he immedia-

tely invites Tom to his hotel-room, entertains him with liquor and tobacco, gets all the information that would help him, and then bundles him out of his room. This confirms our view that he is a strategist, and that he is harbouring a certain amorous design with regard to Louisa.

A strategem. The next strategem he employs in the pursuit of his design is that he first makes Louisa conscious of Tom's ingratitude towards her in spite of her generosity towards him in giving him money whenever he needs it, and then coaxes Tom into showing some sort of sign in acknowledgement of the favours that Louisa has been doing to him in giving him money to pay back his gambling debts. By this device, he acquires a soft corner in the heart of Louisa, who has always felt that, in spite of her affection and love for Tom, her brother has not been reciprocating it.

His eloquent declaration of love. Then a stage comes when the intimacy between Harthouse and Louisa has developed to a point at which he declares his love to her in very eloquent language. Indeed, it is surprising that a man, who has always a weary and indifferent manner about him, should be capable of speaking to a woman in such ardent terms. He tells her that there never was a slave so devoted to his mistress and so ill-treated by her. Her sunny presence always warms him into life, he says. He has never, he goes on to tell her, been so charmed by any other woman in the world as he has been by her. He is willing to fall prostrate under her foot ; he regards her as the most beautiful, the most engaging, and the most imperious woman. It is for her to decide his fate. He is willing to take her away from her home ; he can continue to remain here as her secret lover if she accepts him ; in fact, he will do anything to get some response from her to his passion. Of course, Harthouse is not in the least aware that the lady with the Roman nose* is overhearing his declaration of love to Louisa. He is almost certain that Louisa will agree to one of the alternatives he has suggested.

"Not a moral sort of fellow." There is a big surprise waiting for this shrewd, cunning, unscrupulous villain who has grossly abused the hospitality extended to him by his host (though the host himself is a villain of another kind). Getting no message, communication, or signal from Louisa, whose heart he thinks he has completely won and whose heart in fact he has largely conquered, he receives an unexpected visit from a young lady who makes him conscious of the deception he has been practising and the villainy he is guilty of. Harthouse is shrewd enough to understand the situation. He admits to his visitor that he is not "a moral sort

*The lady with the Roman nose (and Coriolanian eyebrows) is Mrs. Sparsit.

of fellow" and that he never pretended that he had any moral principles. "I am as immoral as need be," he says. He also claims that he had no particularly evil intentions originally but that he has been just moving from one step to another smoothly and almost unknowingly. He accepts full responsibility for the predicament in which Louisa now finds herself. "I am solely to blame for the thing having come to this," he says, adding that even now he has no hope of ever becoming a moral sort of fellow and that he does not believe that any moral sort of fellow exists in the world. When it is suggested to him that he should leave Coketown immediately in the interest of Louisa to whom he has done so much damage, he instantly agrees. We cannot say that his agreeing to quit Coketown immediately is a redeeming quality in him. What, after all, could a politician-turned-lover, thwarted in his nefarious purpose, have done under the circumstances except beat a hasty retreat ?

Not without a sense of humour. Harthouse shows a certain sense of humour when he realises that the young lady who has cornered him and has made him acquiesce in her proposal that he should depart from Coketown immediately is only a dependant in the Gradgrind family. It was a defeat enough to have been thwarted in his plan to take away Louisa from her home in order to make her his mistress. But the defeat becomes much more ignominious when the emissary of the mistress who has rejected him proves to be a poor girl whose father was only a circus-clown. Harthouse's meditation on this situation is really amusing. "The defeat may now be considered perfectly accomplished." he says to himself. "Only a poor girl—only a stroller—only James Harthouse made nothing of—only James Harthouse a great pyramid of failure", he frankly admits. He is a man who can deceive others but he does not deceive himself because he fully recognizes the stark fact of his defeat.

A target of satire. James Harthouse is one of the principal targets of satire in the novel, and the author's satirical treatment of this character provides plenty of entertainment for us. He is truly an entertaining rogue.

22

The Character and Role of Tom Gradgrind (the "Whelp")

A villainous character. Selfish, ungrateful, dishonest, untruthful, crooked—this is how Tom Gradgrind can most aptly be described. Evidently he belongs to the category of the villainous characters in the novel, and he is perhaps the worst of them all. There is hardly any redeeming quality in this man.

His strong distaste for his life at home. We meet Tom early in the story when he is still a boy studying at his father's "model" school where he is being trained to "mathematical exactness" and where his mind is being stuffed with "facts." He shares with his sister Louisa a distaste for the manner in which their father is bringing them up ; only in his case, the distaste is strong enough to be called an abhorrence. At this stage, there is an almost genuine attachment between brother and sister, and Tom, in whom all sentiment subsequently withers away, is at this time quite affectionate towards his sister. He tells her that he is sick of his life in his father's home, that he hates it altogether, and that he hates everybody except her. He is generally sullen and sulky, and in a most disgruntled tone, he calls himself a donkey and a mule ; he describes himself as being obstinate and stupid. His father's home is described by him as a "jaundiced jail".

His planning about his future. Already as a boy, Tom is looking forward to having his revenge when he grows up and goes to live with his would-be employer, Bounderby. By revenge, he means that he will enjoy himself, go about seeing and hearing things, and thus compensate himself for the disagreeable manner in which he is being brought up. He even claims that he will be able to manage Bounderby in such a way as to derive the maximum benefit from him. His method of dealing with Bounderby will be to obtain favours from him in the name of his sister Louisa who, as is evident to him, is Bounderby's pet. And, so far as this aspect of the matter is concerned, he proves to be as true as his word, because he exploits his sister to the utmost, when the time comes.

Tom's utter selfishness in his wanting Louisa to marry Bounderby. Tom is very anxious that his sister should accept Bounderby's proposal of marriage. As soon as he learns that the proposal is going to be conveyed to Louisa, he rushes to her in advance and urges her not to reject the proposal. This is how he puts the matter to her : "It would do me a great deal of good if you were to make up your mind to I know what, Loo. It would be a splendid thing for me. It would be uncommonly jolly." ("Uncommonly jolly" is a favourite phrase of his). His utter selfishness is apparent in this advice which he gives to his sister. It does not occur to him at all what Louisa's own feelings in the matter are ; nor does the disparity of age between Louisa and Bounderby matter to him. He is a true product of his father's utilitarian philosophy, and, like his father, makes light of the disparity not only between the ages but between the temperaments of Louisa and Bounderby. When the marriage does take place, Tom is jubilant over the fact of the marriage because of the advantages that he will derive from this alliance. He expresses his feelings to his sister on this occasion in the following manner : "What a game girl you are, to be such a first-rate sister, Loo." She is a "first-rate sister" because, in her name, he will be able to enjoy certain privileges at Bounderby's bank.

Easily taken in by Harthouse. Tom shows himself to be a shallow-minded, pleasure-loving person devoid of all self-respect. When James Harthouse takes him to his hotel and entertains him to some excellent liquor and tobacco, he begins to blurt out things which no decent brother or brother-in-law would mention. He is such a simpleton that he does not understand Harthouse's motives in entertaining him. As the author tells us, Tom is unable to govern himself even for five consecutive minutes. The author describes him as a hypocrite, too. Tom tells James Harthouse that he does not care a fig for old Bounderby, that his sister never cared for him either, and that she married him because she could not refuse her father's suggestion. "She never had a lover, and the governor* proposed old Bounderby, and she took him," Tom tells Harthouse, explaining the circumstances of Louisa's marriage with Bounderby.

His comments upon his father's system. And yet Tom does understand the defect of the system under which he and his sister have been brought up. He tells Harthouse that his father had "crammed Louisa with all sorts of dry bones and sawdust" because such was his system ; and he goes on to say that he himself was formed and trained in the same manner. "When I first left him and went to old Bounderby I was as flat as a warming-pan, and knew no more about life than any oyster does," he says. But since then he has picked up a little, no thanks to the governor, he adds.

*"Governor" was a term commonly employed by English boys to refer to their fathers.

The damage he does to his sister. During this interview with Harthouse, Tom has unknowingly and foolishly given him all the information that James Harthouse needed for his purpose, and in doing so he has done a lot of damage to his sister. In this context, the author observes that if the whelp (that is, Tom) had realised the mischief he had done that evening, he would have gone and drowned himself in the filthy waters of the nearby river. Tom was, indeed, right, when he called himself stupid early in his life. Besides being stupid and selfish, he shows himself in this interview to be something of a braggart also.

His misappropriation of the bank money. In order to compensate himself for the rigidity of the discipline under which he was brought up, Tom now takes to evil courses. He becomes a gambler, and incurs heavy debts. For some time he keeps asking his sister for money and receiving from her enough to pay his gambling debts. But a stage comes when his sister can afford to pay him no more and then he sees no alternative except to misappropriate the funds of the bank which are in his custody. He is cunning enough to manipulate evidence on the basis of which another man, namely, Stephen Blackpool can plausibly be accused of having committed a robbery at the bank. His sister has a dim suspicion that the robbery has been committed by Tom himself, but, although she tries to probe *him* in order to find out the truth so that she can help him out of any possible trouble that may arise later, he stoutly disclaims all responsibility for the robbery. However, unscrupulous though he is, his conscience does prick him at this time, and, when his sister has withdrawn from his room, he throws himself upon his pillow, tears his hair, cries, grudgingly loving his sister, hatefully spurning himself, and thus feeling utterly miserable.

His rank ingratitude to his sister. The dying words of Stephen point to Tom as the real culprit. At this time, at Sissy's suggestion, Tom flees from the scene and takes shelter with Mr. Sleary at the latter's circus. There he is overtaken by Bitzer who catches hold of him in order to take him back to Bounderby, and it is only through Mr. Sleary's devices that it becomes possible for him to escape to Liverpool and board a ship sailing to a foreign land. While departing, he does mumble a few words of apology to his father but he shows himself to be guilty of rank ingratitude towards his sister whom he accuses of having deserted him in his hour of crisis. After all the *love* Louisa has been lavishing upon him throughout, he speaks to her at this time in a most offensively sarcastic manner, charging her with callousness towards him. Eventually he dies in a foreign land with the name of his sister on his lips, because in his heart of hearts he does realise, at least when his death approaches, that his sister was his best friend.

An illustration of the failure of the utilitarian philosophy. The end which Tom meets arouses not the least regret or

sympathy in our minds. The kind of death that he meets was fully deserved by him. The portrayal of Tom's character is intended by the author to be one more illustration in the book of the disastrous consequences to which the materialistic and utilitarian philosophy of Gradgrind and Bounderby can lead. Although not one of the principal characters in the story, Tom is yet vital to it. The way he defends his action in robbing the bank is an ironic commentary on the educational theory which Gradgrind once used to advocate with great emphasis and persistence. When his father says that he has felt shocked by Tom's dishonesty, Tom replies: "I don't see why. So many people are employed in situations of trust; so many people, out of so many, will be dishonest. I have heard you talk, a hundred times, of its being a law. How can I help laws? You have comforted others with such things, father. Comfort yourself."

23

The Character and Role of Cecilia Jupe (Sissy)

Her ignorance of "facts". We meet Cecilia Jupe, nicknamed Sissy by her father, at the very outset as "Girl Number 20". She is the daughter of a circus-clown, studying at the "model" school established by Gradgrind. She feels embarrassed when told by Gradgrind that her father should not call her "Sissy" but "Cecilia." She feels even more embarrassed when she is unable to define a horse in accordance with "facts". Her answers to a couple of more questions are found to be even more unsatisfactory. She is fond of flowers, she says ; but a carpet with a design of flowers on it, she is told, must not be spread on a drawing-room floor. Objection is also taken to her using the word "fancy", because to fancy is absolutely contrary to facts.

Abandoned by her father ; her unwav ring faith in him despite this. Gradgrind and Bounderby suspect that Louisa's curiosty to take a look at some of the circus acts through a tent-hole is due to her contact with Sissy in the school. Accordingly the two friends decide to expel Sissy from the "model" institution. However, Sissy becomes an object of great sympathy for everyone (except Bounderby) when it is found that her father has absconded, thus forsaking her. Sissy can never believe that her father would desert her. and she has a firm conviction that he will soon return. However, when the possibility of his return is ruled out, she is taken by Gradgrind under his own protection, much to the disappointment of Bounderby. Even under Gradgrind's roof Sissy keeps hoping that her father would one day return and she continues to keep with great care the bottle of oils which she had been sent to obtain for her father who needed the oils for a massage.

Her unsatisfactory performance at school. Living under Gradgrind's roof, Sissy attends to the needs of the ailing wife of her patron and at the same time continues to attend school. Her pro-

gress at school is, however, disappointing. She cannot give "factual" answers to any of the questions. And yet, it must be admitted, there is a core of truth in all her answers, however unsatisfactory and ridiculous they may appear to be from the strictly academic point of view. To take only one example, when she is asked if the nation is prosperous, her reply is that she cannot know whether it is a prosperous nation or not unless she first knows who has got the money and whether any of it belongs to her. Gradgrind, though dissatisfied with Sissy's performance at school, yet feels some kind of affection for her because he finds her very useful in his household, especially in looking after his ailing wife. In fact, as the story proceeds, we find that the services she renders to the Gradgrind family are weighty and valuable.

Her relations with Louisa. Louisa is quite friendly with Sissy in the beginning. In fact, Louisa's curiosity about the circus-performance is traced by Gradgrind and Bounderby to her association with Sissy. When Sissy begins to stay under Gradgrind's roof as his protege, Louisa's friendliness towards Sissy becomes even greater. Sissy tells the story of her life to Louisa and she speaks despairingly regarding the scanty progress that she is making at school. Louisa's friendliness, however, turns into utter coldness when, on learning that Louisa has agreed to marry a much older man than herself, Sissy looks at Louisa disapprovingly. On this occasion, as the author tells us, "Sissy had suddenly turned her head and looked, in wonder, in pity, in sorrow, in doubt, in a multitude of emotions, towards Louisa." From this moment onwards Sissy is kept by Louisa at a distance. This indifferent and cold attitude of Louisa towards Sissy continues for a fairly long time, and Louisa makes no secret of it even on the occasion of her visit to her father's house when her mother is reported to be critically ill. However, Sissy does not waver in her affection for Louisa, and, though ignored by Louisa, remains loyal to her. When Louisa returns to her father's house in a miserable condition, Sissy begs her permission to attend upon her, and nurses her back to health. Sissy's affection for Louisa and her solicitude about Louisa's state of body and mind are, indeed, very touching ; and Louisa is deeply affected by the sisterly kindness of Sissy. From this moment onwards, the old relationship between the two girls is restored.

Her initiative and courage in dealing with Harthouse. A striking aspect of Sissy's character shows itself when she takes the initiative in contacting Harthouse at the latter's hotel and speaks to him respectfully but firmly about the damage that he has done to Louisa by having tried to win Louisa's heart and trying to prevail upon her to elope with him. At this interview, Sissy's true mettle reveals itself. She is not overawed by Harthouse's status or personality, but in round terms accuses him of having played foul in his relationship with Louisa. She even goes to the extent of urging him, though again in respectful terms, to quit Coketown

without delay in order to make amends to Louisa for the injury he has done to her. This interview is one of the highlights of the story, and here we see Sissy in a most favourable light. She has, indeed, achieved a triumph for which Louisa could not have thanked her enough.

The help rendered by her to Tom. Sissy's spirit of enterprise and her devotion to the Gradgrind family are exhibited in another important episode also. When she finds that the dying Stephen has given a clear indication that it was Tom who committed the robbery at the bank, she quietly whispers to Tom to slip away from the scense, advising him to go straight to Mr. Sleary's circus and take shelter there by mentioning her name. Subsequently, she accompanies Gradgrind to Mr. Sleary's circus and renders whatever help is necessary in the arrangements that are to be made for despatching Tom to some foreign land. The whole circus-troupe greets Sissy with great warmth and affection, because she had after all at one time been one of their pets. The manner in which she deals with Harthouse and the manner in which she helps Tom are the two greatest achievements of her life.

Her sterling qualities ; a minor heroine Thus we find that Sissy plays a crucial role in the novel. Indeed, she is vital to the plot, if not altogether indispensable. Apart from the importance of her role in the story, her character is by itself an important element in the design of the book. She is a simple homely, unlearned, unsophisticated kind of girl with plenty of common sense and natural intelligence. She is a girl with a sterling character. Her unwavering confidence that her father can never forsake her, her devotion to the Gradgrind family, her sheer goodness of heart, her affectionate nature, her unselfishness and honesty of purpose, and her spirit of enterprise and initiative—all these qualities make of her a minor heroine.

24

The Mind and Character of Mrs. Sparsit

A well-connected elderly woman. Mrs. Sparsit is introduced to us as an elderly lady working as Mr Bounderby's housekeeper and receiving from him a certain amount of annual stipend which she prefers to describe as an "annual compliment". This woman has seen better days and is highly connected. She has a great-aunt by the name of Lady Scadgers, an immensely fat old woman with an excessive appetite for butcher's meat. Mrs. Sparsit is very proud of the fact that her husband was a "Powler" on his mother's side. Her husband died prematurely at the age of twenty-four, leaving her in no affluent circumstances.

Her Coriolanian eyebrows and Roman nose. Mrs. Sparsit has dense black Coriolanian eyebrows and a Roman nose. (There are numerous references to Mrs. Sparsit's Coriolanian eyebrows and her Roman nose throughout the novel). Mr. Bounderby is very proud of the fact that he has got as his housekeeper a woman with an aristocratic background which he mentions whenever he finds an opportunity to do so.

Her complete lack of sympathy for workmen. Mrs. Sparsit is a target of satire throughout the story. Apart from repeated references to her Coriolanian eyebrows and Roman nose, she receives the author's special attention as an object of extreme dislike and even disgust. Mrs. Sparsit shares her employer's contempt for the workers and, on account of this feeling of disdain towards them, she shows a complete lack of sympathy for Stephen when he comes to Bounderby for advice in his matrimonial troubles. Instead of feeling any sympathy for Stephen she regards him as symbolising "the impiety of the people", and looks quite dejected by the popular vices one of which at least is represented, in her eyes, by Stephen.

Her reaction to Bounderby's decision to marry Louisa. Mrs. Sparsit does not at all relish the idea of Mrs. Bounderby's marrying Louisa, and Mr. Bounderby can anticipate her strong

disapproval of his intention to marry Louisa. Mr. Bounderby goes home with a bottle of smelling-salts, thinking that Mrs. Sparsit would faint on receiving this unwelcome* news. Great must be his surprise, therefore, when she listens to the unwelcome news without showing any sign whatsoever of being mentally upset or agitated. Her answer to Mr. Bounderby's announcement of his intention is that she hopes that he would be happy as Louisa's husband. Mr. Bounderby is simply amazed at Mrs. Sparsit's coolness on hearing the news which, he had thought, would upset her greatly. She is also prepared for her being asked to shift to another premises in view of the fact that she would not feel exactly comfortable when Mr. Bounderby gets married and brings home a wife who is expected to look after the household without there being the need of a housekepeer. Mrs. Sparsit now behaves as if she were full of sympathy for Mr. Bounderby in the misfortune that is going to befall him in the form of his marriage with Louisa. "And I hope, sir," she says to him, "I fondly hope that Miss Gradgrind may be all you desire, and deserve." Nothing moves Mrs. Sparsit from this position, and it is in vain for Mr. Bounderby to bluster or to assert himself.† She is resolved to have compassion on him, as a "victim". She used to be polite, obliging, cheerful, and hopeful, but she is now all the more so because her employer is going to become a victim of the marriage that he has decided upon.

The bank fairy or the bank dragon? Mrs. Sparsit's attitude of sympathy for the victim of the marriage continues even after the marriage has taken place. She is now living in an apartment at Mr. Bounderby's bank. "He had been married now a year, and Mrs. Sparsit had never released him from her determined pity a moment," the author tells us. Her behaviour at the bank shows a consciousness of her importance as a person with an aristocratic background. She thinks that she is shedding a feminine, not to say also aristocratic, grace upon the office : "Seated, with her needle-work or knitting apparatus, at the window, she had a self-laudatory sense of correcting, by her lady-like deportment, the rude business aspect of the place." Indeed, she thinks herself, in some sort, "the bank fairy," although the townspeople look upon her as "the bank dragon**" keeping a watch over the treasures of her employer.

Her using Bitzer as a spy. Mrs. Sparsit is attended upon by Bitzer whom we know to be an old student of Mrs. Gradgrind's "model" school. Bitzer is the light porter at the bank and his

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*The news is unwelcome because Mrs. Sparsit had inwardly been hoping that one day Bounderby would propose marriage to none other than Mrs. Sparsit herself.

† Page 112 of the novel.

** Page 118 of the novel.

duties include attending upon Mrs. Sparsit whenever she needs his services. Being a shrewd woman, she makes use of Bitzer to get all the information about what is going on in the bank and in this way keeps herself acquainted with the day-to-day developments in the bank establishment. When, on one occasion, Bitzer informs her that the workers are uniting and organising themselves, Mrs. Sparsit, whose contempt for the workers is already known to us, expresses the view that the employers should also unite in order to crush any strength that the workers might acquire through their union.

No names to be mentioned. Mrs. Sparsit is a very careful kind of woman and has given strict instructions to Bitzer never to mention any names whenever he is giving her any information regarding the affairs of the bank or other matters. She tells Bitzer that, in view of the fact that Mr. Bounderby fully recognises her family background, she will always be faithful and loyal to him. One of the ways in which she shows her loyalty to Mr. Bounderby is that she does not allow names to be mentioned under the roof of her apartment.

Harthouse's interview with her. Mrs. Sparsit's interview with James Harthouse when he arrives in Coketown and is looking for Mr. Bounderby serves to illustrate certain traits of her character which we have already known before. She finds the opportunity to inform him that her husband was a "Powler." She also tells Harthouse that she is the servant of circumstances and has adapted herself to the governing power of her life. When Harthouse shows a certain curiosity with regard to Bounderby's wife, Mrs. Sparsit refers to her as a "chit not twenty when she was married". It is obvious that she has no liking at all for Mrs. Bounderby. After Harthouse has left, Mrs. Sparsit keeps sitting at the window till after sunset. It is only when the light porter announces that her usual sweetbread, for which she has a special liking, is ready that Mrs. Sparsit's meditations come to an end, and then she says, "Oh you fool!" But whom she means is not quite clear. Perhaps she means that she has missed the opportunity of trying to conquer Harthouse's heart.

A rich source of comedy. Mrs. Sparsit is a source of plenty of comedy in the novel. We feel greatly amused by her behaviour on various occasions. To take only one example, she is very humble and cringing towards Mr. Bounderby in his presence but contemptuous of him in private. When Mr. Bounderby is present, she is extremely deferential and respectful towards him but, when alone, she aims her fist at his portrait and calls him a "noodle", and this she does again and again. She is the very embodiment of hypocrisy. Pretending to be a well-wisher of Mr. Bounderby, she actually wishes him ill and waits gleefully for the time when Mr. Bounderby's wife will prove unfaithful to him. She has in her imagination built up a huge staircase and she can see, in her imagination, Mrs. Bounderby going down the stairs and falling into

the pit below. She plays the spy, watching every movement of Mrs. Bounderby like a hawk. She overhears the amorous words of Harthouse to Mrs. Bounderby and jumps to the conclusion, which is nothing but wishful thinking, that Mrs. Bounderby is going to elope with Harthouse. She rushes to London to inform Mr. Bounderby that his wife has run away. Great is her discomfiture when it is found that Mrs. Bounderby has not run away and that she has come to her father's house instead. Mrs. Sparsit then takes refuge in tears. Her whole strategy has misfired, and she finds that circumstances have conspired to make a fool of her. Her embarrassment at this time is even greater than when she had lost track of Louisa, while chasing her.

Her cool-headedness and her hypocrisy. During her stay at Bounderby's house, when she is supposed to be recovering her nerves from the shock of the robbery at the bank, she is all the time keeping a close watch on Mrs. Bounderby and, at the same time, striving to keep Mr. Bounderby in good humour by constantly speaking words of fulsome flattery to him. "She was a most wonderful woman for prowling about the house," the author tells us. What is more, this woman remains always cool-headed under all circumstances. She is in full possession of her breath and her dignity on all occasions. The author describes her at this time as "a pattern of consistency, continuing to take such pity on Mr. Bounderby to his face as is rarely taken on man, and to call his portrait a noodle to its face with the greatest acrimony and contempt."

Her withering contempt for Bounderby. Mrs. Sparsit faces the greatest defeat of her life when, in her efforts to prove herself a master-mind, she drags Mrs. Pegler from her country-home to Mr. Bounderby's house and when, as a consequence of this action, Mr. Bounderby is exposed as a fraud and an impostor. Mr. Bounderby can no longer endure this woman after this exposure. He dismisses her, but the manner in which she takes this dismissal does her great credit. She does not show the least surprise, and not the least sign of any mental disturbance. She is as cool on this occasion as she has always been before. In fact, she shows much wit on this occasion and she sees no reason any longer to keep her contempt for Mr. Bounderby a secret. She ridicules him saying that everybody knows how "unerring" his judgment is, and that his unerring judgment is the theme of general conversation in the town. While leaving, Mrs. Sparsit, "with her Roman features like a medal stuck to commemorate her scorn of Mr. Bounderby," surveys him fixedly from head to foot after revealing to him that she has habitually been addressing his portrait as a "noodle*". "Nothing that a noodle does can awaken surprise or indignation. The proceedings of a noodle can only inspire contempt**," she says to him. He is dumbfounded, of course, by her parting kick.

*simpleton ; idiot.

**Page 290 of the novel.

25

Stephen Blackpool and Rachel

Stephen, prematurely old. Stephen Blackpool is a "rather stooping man, with a knitted brow, a pondering expression of face, and a hard-looking head having long and thin iron-grey hair on it". He is about forty years of age, but he looks older because he has had a hard life. He is generally called "Old Stephen" in view of the fact that the troubles he has gone through in the course of life have imparted to him a look of premature old age.

His efficiency, integrity, steadiness. Stephen is not a man of any exceptional intelligence. Nor does he occupy any position of importance among the workers; he is not the kind of man who can make speeches and participate in debates. But he is a good power-loom weaver, and a man of perfect integrity. Even Bounderby, who is otherwise contemptuous of his workers, recognises Stephen as a "steady hand".

His unfortunate marriage. The great misfortune of Stephen's life is that he happened to marry a woman who turned out to be most unsuitable for a man of his temperament. As he tells Bounderby, he got married to this woman about nineteen years ago when she was a young and pretty lass, but she went bad soon. She took to drinking, left off working, sold the furniture, pawned clothes, and made a regular nuisance of herself to him. He tried his utmost to reform her but he failed. She continues to claim her rights as a wife, visiting him off and on and using rough language to him. In other words, his domestic life has been a perpetual torment to him. The story of his life which he tells Bounderby arouses our deepest sympathy for this unfortunate man although Bounderby remains completely unmoved.

Rachel's physical appearance. As was inevitable under the circumstances, Stephen sought comfort in the company of another woman, Rachel by name, who, like himself, is a factory hand. Rachel is now thirtyfive years of age, "with a quiet oval face, dark and rather delicate, irradiated by a pair of very gentle eyes and

shining black hair". Rachel has a neat figure and a sober carriage. The friendship between Stephen and Rachel is genuine and deep. Both understand each other completely. However, Stephen's wife is the obstacle in the way of the union of these two kindred souls.

Life a "muddle" to Stephen. When Stephen asks Bounderby if there is any way by which he can get rid of his wife in order to make his life less miserable, Bounderby tells him that to obtain a legal separation would be a very protracted and costly process and that a man in his position should not even think of resorting to the legal procedure. Stephen's unhappy experiences in his life, mainly because of his drunken wife, have made him look upon life as a "muddle". In fact, "all is a muddle" to him now because he looks at everything through the distorted spectacles of his unhappy past. Whenever he is faced with a difficult situation, he describes it as a "muddle".

Stephen's attitude to the workers' union. Stephen incurs the bitterest possible hostility of the workers' union* because he has refused to join the union. He tells Bounderby that he has given a promise to somebody that he would not get entangled in the affairs of the union so as not to complicate his life still further. The person to whom he gave this promise is no other than Rachel who had urged him to keep away from the activities of the union because, knowing his temperament very well, she thought it desirable that he should not get embroiled in union activities. His refusal to join the workers does not, however, mean that he does not realise the hardships which the workers have to endure. When Bounderby summons him in order to extract from him some information regarding the activities of the union, Stephen bluntly refuses to play the role of an informer. In fact, he puts up a spirited defence of the aims of the union though he is opposed to its methods. He describes to Bounderby the needs, requirements, desires, and aspirations of the workers, trying to focus the factory-owner's attention upon the workers' problems, though he fails to touch any responsive chord in Bounderby's heart. For his refusal to supply the required inside information about the workers' union, he is dismissed by Bounderby on the spot. When he pleads that he will not be able to get another job, he is told that he is a trouble-maker and that nothing more needs to be said on the subject.

Taken in by the tricky Tom. Being a simple-minded and honest man, Stephen is easily taken in by Tom Gradgrind and, in compliance with this fellow's wishes, he loiters close to the building of Bounderby's bank on two or three evenings, waiting for some communication which Tom had promised to send him. This innocent action on Stephen's part eventually draws upon him the suspicion that he is the culprit who, in collusion with an old woman seen in his company, committed the robbery at the bank.

* The "United Aggregate Tribunal".

"Sent to Coventry." When Stephen feels compelled to quit Coketown two or three days after Bounderby's order of dismissal, he bids farewell to Rachel with a heavy heart. Rachel too is greatly distressed by the turn which the circumstances have taken. An honest workman with an excellent record at the factory has been ex-communicated by the workers' union (or in technical language, has been "sent to Coventry") on one hand, and spurned and discarded by the employer on the other hand. This is one of the strangest ironies in the life of a workman.

The parting between Stephen and Rachel. The parting between Stephen and Rachel is truly moving. The passage in which this parting is commented upon by the author deserves to be quoted :

> "It was but a hurried parting in a common street, yet it was a sacred remembrance to these two common people. Utilitarian economists, skeletons of schoolmasters, commissioners of facts, genteel and used-up infidels, the poor you will have always with you. Cultivate in them, while there is yet time, the utmost graces of the fancies and affections to adorn their lives so much in need of ornament ; or in the day of your triumph, when romance is utterly driven out of their souls, and a bare existence stands face to face. reality will take a wolfish turn and make an end of you".

These lines in fact contain a warning to the greedy and narrow-minded thinkers and theorists who attach no importance to the kind of sacred relationship that exists between two such noble-minded persons as Stephen and Rachel.

Rachel, a true angel. One of the most striking incidents in this novel throws much light on the characters of both Stephen and Rachel. Stephen's wife is lying on Stephen's bed in a drunken stupor. Rachel, out of the gentleness of her heart, has been attending upon the sick woman who has now fallen into a doze. Stephen, sitting in another chair close by, is also feeling overcome by sleep. Suddenly the drunken woman wakes up and picks up a bottle lying on the table thinking it to be liquor though actually it is poison that would kill her. She is about to swallow the contents of the bottle, with Stephen observing her action and yet continuing to sit rigidly in his chair, when Rachel wakes up with a start and, taking in the situation in an instant, snatches away the bottle from the drunken woman's hand. Stephen would probably have let his wife swallow the contents of the bottle and meet the death which she deserves. Rachel, too, would have done the same if she were not Rachel but any other woman. As it is, Rachel performs an act which can most aptly be described as "angelic". Stephen realises what a sinner he

would have been if he had allowed his wife to die in this manner, and he realises even more keenly what an act of supreme grace Rachel has performed thereby not only showing her innate nobility but also saving him from what could have been a life-long sense of guilt weighing upon his soul. Accordingly, this is what Stephen says to Rachel on this occasion : "Thou art an angel. Bless thee, bless thee !" But Rachel merely thinks that she has done what any decent human being should have done ; she has no exalted sense of her action ; and so her reply to Stephen's lyrical utterance is : "I am, as I have told thee, Stephen, thy poor friend. Angels are not like me".

Rachel's faith in Stephen's integrity. Rachel's faith in Stephen's integrity does not waver at any stage. When a reward is announced for the person who helps in the arrest of Stephen on the charge of committing a robbery at the bank, Rachel becomes indignant. She cannot endure the name of an innocent man being dragged into the mud, and so she is up in arms. She immediately goes to Bounderby and describes to him all the details of the visit of Louisa and Tom to Stephen, Louisa's offer of a large sum of money to Stephen, Stephen's politely refusing, for reasons of self-respect, to accept the profferred sum taking just two pounds in order not to displease Louisa, and so on. When Bounderby disbelieves the story, Rachel insists upon confronting him with Louisa who then confirms the facts as stated by Rachel.

Kind-hearted and gentle, but not lacking in initiative. Rachel is kind-hearted, gentle, and sympathetic, but she is not utterly passive and lacking in the spirit of initiative and enterprise (qualities which we see in Sissy also). Rachel is now bent upon seeing Stephen's innocence established and recognised, and so she writes to him to come to Coketown immediately. When Bounderby's suspicion regarding Stephen persists, pending Stephen's expected return to Coketown, Rachel is described by the author as "throwing off all distrust as a rock throws off the sea." She tells Bounderby that Stephen will be in Coketown in two days at the latest.

Stephen's innocence established. Nor does Rachel's confidence in Stephen's integrity give way when Stephen fails to turn up. A suspicion now crosses her mind that the real culprit must have put Stephen out of the way, meaning that Stephen might have been put to death, so that the real culprit should not be apprehended by Stephen's proving his innocence. It is by sheer chance that Rachel and Sissy find Stephen's hat in the wood, a discovery which ultimately leads to a rescue being organised and Stephen being found in a state from which recovery is impossible. Rachel's grief at this time is indescribable and Stephen is now more than ever justified in declaring that life is "a muddle, from first to last". At this time Stephen also reminds Rachel of her little sister who had died prematurely under tragic circumstances. The death of

that innocent child was another proof of all life being a muddle. Before Stephen dies, he is able to clear himself of the charge of robbery that had been published against him ; and is able to give to Gradgrind the hint which leads to the real culprit being identified.

A contrast between Stephen and Slackbridge. It is noteworthy that Stephen Blackpool's indictment of the misery inflicted by contemporary industrialism wins our approval while that of Slackbridge fails to do so. Stephen, after having been rescued, thus comments on the pit into which he had fallen : "When it were in work, it killed without need ; when it's let alone, it kills without need. See how we die and no need, one way and another—in a muddle, every day !" Slackbridge thus addresses the workers of Coketown : "I tell you that the hour is come, when we must rally round one another as one united power, and crumble into dust the oppressors that too long have battened upon the plunder of our families, upon the sweat of our brows, upon the labour of our hands, upon the strength of our sinews, upon the God-created glorious rights of humanity, and upon the holy and eternal privileges of brotherhood". In Stephen's case there is a sympathetic bond with the reader, while Slackbridge leaves us cold. Stephen is a living instance of the misery he condemns while, with his empty pompous cliches, Slackbridge fails to move our sympathy for the down-trodden operatives.

26

The People of the Circus

A contrast between the circus people and the utilitarians. We make our first acquaintance with Mr. Sleary's circus through Cecilia Jupe (Sissy), the daughter of the circus-clown who, finding himself unable any longer to amuse the audiences, runs away, leaving his daughter to an uncertain fate. Although this action of Sissy's father is unpardonable, yet, on the whole, we form a very good impression about the circus people who are intended as a contrast to the utilitarian educationists and industrialists represented by Gradgrind and Bounderby.

A sense of community among these people. The general character of the circus people is thus described by the author. "There was a remarkable gentleness and childishness about these people, a special inaptitude for any kind of sharp practice, and an untiring readiness to help and pity one another, deserving often of as much respect, and always of as much generous construction, as the everyday virtues of any class of people in the world." This tribute is fully deserved by the circus people, the most striking example of its justice being the sympathy which all of them have for the girl who has been abandoned by her father. They all react sharply to Bounderby's bluntness in talking of the behaviour of Sissy's father. When Bounderby sharply says to Sissy that her father has abscorded and deserted her, some of the members of the circus-troupe mutter the words "shame" and "brute" as a protest against Bounderby's way of speaking to the unhappy girl. Mr. Sleary tells Bounderby that, though his people are very good-natured, they can go to the length of throwing him out of the window if he speaks in that heartless manner to the little girl. Later, when Sissy, now a grown-up girl, visits these people, they all gather round her, brimming with happiness, affection, and love, and make all kinds of inquiries about her welfare. In other words, there is a sense of community among these people ; they are bound to one another not only by the ties of their profession but also by the bonds of a human sympathy which has not been extinguished by any training in "Facts". These people represent natural instincts and impulses which have not been crushed or suppressed or

undermined by ill-conceived theories ef education and by the utilitarian economic doctrines of the time.

Bounderby deflated by two members of the circus. Simple-minded and sympathetic as these people are, they are not prepared to brook any nonsense. When Bounderby speaks to Mr Childers and Master Kidderminster in a bumptious and self-important manner, they both react sharply, and Master Kidderminster feels even more annoyed than his senior. Mr. Childers and his assistant simply refuse to be awed or even impressed by Bounderby's wealth. Finding Gradgrind to be a more reasonable sort of person. Mr. Childers now completely ignores Bounderby as if he did not exist and addresses himself only to Gradgrind to give an account of the reasons for Sissy's father having run away. In this episode we have a mingling of the pathos of the circus-clown's frustration and the comedy of the deflation of Bounderby by these two members of the troupe.

Mr. Sleary, a kind-hearted man. Mr. Sleary, the circus-owner, is undoubtedly an able organiser with a lot of the milk of human kindness in him. If Gradgrind is willing to take away Sissy and look after her, well and good ; otherwise Mr. Sleary will himself look to the upbringing of Sissy and do the best that he can for her. Indeed, he feels a real paternal interest in Sissy ; and this attitude is to be contrasted with Bounderby's contemptuous attitude.

The role of the circus people in the plot. Apart from contributing such an excellent specimen of womanhood as Sissy to the story of the novel, the circus people play another vital role also. Mr. Sleary so arranges matters that Bitzer is cheated of his hope of taking Tom back to Coketown to be produced before Bounderby on a charge of having robbed the bank. The trained horse and the trained dog belonging to Mr. Sleary's circus prevent Bitzer from carrying out his purpose, while Tom is thus afforded an opportunity to escape from Bitzer's clutches.

Nothing mercenary about Mr. Sleary. Mr. Sleary is not a mercenary man. When Gradgrind offers him a handsome amount of money to pay him for the services that he has rendered to Tom, Mr. Sleary declines the offer. All that he would accept is a five-pound note for Mr. Childers who drove the carriage, a collar for the dog, a set of bells for the horse, some refreshment for the circus troupe, and a little brandy-and-water for himself.

Mr. Sleary's simple philosophy. Mr. Sleary has a philosophy of life which he sums up in the following words addressed to Gradgrind : "Don't be cross with us poor vagabonds. People must be amused. They can't be always a-learning, nor yet they cannot be always a-working ; they aren't made for it. You must have us, Squire. Do the wise thing and the kind thing too, and make the

best of us, not the worst." Of course, Mr. Sleary speaks these words in his inevitable lisping manner. What he means to say is that the circus plays a vital part in the lives of the common people who, in addition to learning and working, need some diversion also. Mr. Sleary stated this philosophy at the beginning of the novel, and he states it now at the end. However, he has something even more important to say as appears in a passage spoken by him when he describes the death of the dog which was the pet of Sissy's father. (That passage is quoted later in this very chapter).

A source of humour. The portrayal of the circus-folk adds to the variety of characterisation in the story, at the same time presenting, as already stated above, a contrast to the utilitarians and the statisticians represented by Bounderby and Gradgrind. Not only that ; these persons are a source of considerable humour in the book. Mr. Sleary's lisping is certainly comic ; so is the behaviour of Mr. Childers and his pigmy assistant toward the conceited Bounderby ; so is the technique by which the trained circus-horse and the equally trained circus-dog prevent Bitzer from carrying out his purpose. Mr. Sleary's copious and garrulous talk is itself comic, even apart from his natural lisping manner ; comic also is the state in which he is generally found : neither drunk nor sober.

This is how a critic* describes the circus and its function in the novel : "At the other end Sleary's circus has a similarly representative function in the novel, though it too is active in the plot. Like Sissy, who is one of them, the people of the circus stand at the extreme of uncalculating, spontaneous human affection, though innocent of anything that would pass for learning with Gradgrind. Superficially they are not very attractive : there is a brusque insolence and assumption of superiority about Childers and especially Kidderminster (albeit a suitable reaction to Bounderby's bullying roughness) ; and Sleary himself is described in terms which seem to promise the worst :

> a stout man with one fixed eye and one loose eye, a voice (if it can be called so) like the efforts of a broken old pair of bellows, a flabby surface, and a muddled head which was never sober and never drunk.

The circus is not glamourized, but nor is Dickens misled by superficial appearances, nor allows us to be. The qualities of Sleary that matter are not his asthmatic, boozy ugliness, but his unwavering uprightness and gratitude. Dickens sees him vividly as a person, with his roundabout approach to any subject and his suddenly and briskly coming to the point. And there is an irresistible rightness in his coming to deliver the formal moral :

* A. H. Gomme

> "It seems to present two things to a person, don't it, Squire ?" said Sleary, musing as he looked down into the depths of his brandy-and-water ; "one, that there is a love in the world, not all self-interest after all, but something very different ; the other, that it has a way of its own of calculating or not calculating, which somehow or another is at least as hard to give a name to as the way of the dogs is."*

This inescapably is the moral of the story—the moral truth that underlies all the action and evaluates it. It is dramatized throughout in the complex interaction of plot and character. But the novel loses nothing in dignity and gains much in directness by containing this simple statement of it at the end. Sleary is perfectly in character to speak as the does.

* Sleary speaks, of course, in his lisping manner. Here his words have been rendered in plain speech, without the lisp.

27

Some Other Characters

I. BITZER

Satirical description of his physical appearance. We meet Bitzer, early in the novel, as the "colourless boy" who defines a horse in such a way as exactly to satisfy the requirements of the question asked by Gradgrind in the class-room. The description that the author gives us of Bitzer's appearance is satirical, as is the entire portrayal of him throughout the novel. Only one sentence from the description of his physical appearance would suffice as an example of this kind of satire : "His skin was so unwholesomely deficient in natural tinge, that he looked as though, if he were cut, he would bleed white".

Employed at the bank and working as a spy in addition to his normal duties. After graduating from Gradgrind's "model" school, Bitzer gets a job as a light porter at Bounderby's bank, one of his duties in this position being to attend upon Mrs. Sparsit after she has shifted from Bounderby's residence to the premises of Bounderby's bank. The author's description of Bitzer as a light porter at this time in his life is also ironical and satirical. We are told that Bitzer now holds "the respectable office of general spy and informer in the establishment", and that for this service he receives a regular gift at Christmas, over and above his weekly wages.

Devoid of all feelings and sentiments ; callous even towards his mother. Bitzer has grown into an extremely "clear headed, cautious, prudent" young man, who is well qualified to rise in the world. His mind is so exactly regulated that he has no affections, or sentiments, or passions. All his actions now are the result of the minutest and most unemotional calculation. Mrs. Sparsit considers him to be a young man of steady principles. Such are his principles that, on the death of his father, he puts his widowed mother in the workhouse because he would not like to spoil her by keeping her with him and paying for her upkeep !*

* In this respect he almost resembles Bounderby who is equally callous towards his mother.

However, he does send his mother half a pound of tea in the course of a year. Another example of his steady principles is his firm opposition to getting married and rearing a family. Nor can he understand why other men, the factory-workers and labourers for instance, get married, have families, and in this way add to their financial liabilities. In his opinion, a rational approach to life would exclude marriage for people whose means are limited. He agrees, too, with Mrs. Sparsit that workers have no right to organise themselves into a union against their employers. When he is asked by Mrs. Sparsit what the wretched workers are doing, his reply is : "Uniting, and leaguing, and engaging to stand by one another."

The contrast between Bitzer and Tom. As an excellent product of Gradgrind's model school Bitzer has developed powers of close observation and vigilance. He watches all the movements and activities of Tom Gradgrind, and forms what is a perfectly correct opinion of that young rascal. He tells Mrs. Sparsit that Tom is a dissipated, extravagant idler, who is not worth his salt, and that Tom would not be able to keep his job if it were not for his being related to Bounderby through Bounderby's wife. He refers to Tom as being improvident like the common workmen. By contrast, says Bitzer, he himself observes habits of extreme economy, not even spending the gratuity which he receives at Christmas, not, in fact, spending even the entire amount of his wages. Bitzer does not need any recreations, because they would entail undue expenditure. Sensibly enough, Bitzer is opposed to gambling because "the chances are against the players."

Self-interest, his governing motive. We meet Bitzer again when preparations aro being made by the Gradgrind family hastily to despatch Tom to Liverpool to board a ship sailing to some foreign land. Bitzer arrives just in time to catch hold of Tom whom he has always suspected of the robbery that was committed at the bank. Bitzer's motive in catching hold of Tom and wanting to take him back to Coketown is to win the favour of Bounderby and to get as a reward for this service the very position that Tom was holding. His motive, as he frankly admits to Gradgrind, is his self-interest. When Gradgrind pleads with Bitzer, requesting him to let Tom go away, Bitzer reminds Gradgrind that "the whole social system is a question of self-interest", a dictum which he learnt in Gradgrind's own school. He refuses to accept any compensation or bribe in exchange for the favour of releasing Tom because, according to his calculations, he would gain more by delivering Tom into the hands of Bounderby than he would by accepting a bribe of any amount. When Gradgrind reminds Bitzer that it was in his school that Bitzer had been educated, Bitzer reminds Gradgrind that he had always paid his fees at the school. The schooling was a "bargain" which was paid for, and which ended with his schooling. In short, Bitzer remains adamant and relentless in

spite of Gradgrind's entreaties. It is another matter that, as a consequence of the strategy employed by Mr. Sleary, Bitzer is outwitted and robbed of the opportunity that came his way, even though he does get the job he aspired to.

An illustration of the utilitarian principle. Bitzer's function in the plot of the novel is but slight, but he occupies a vital position in the design of the book. He serves as a most striking example of what the educational theory, which Gradgrind used to preach, can lead to. He is one of the finest products of Gradgrind's model school, and this product is no longer a human being but a kind of machine, devoid of all feeling, sentiment, passion, being all reason and calculation. He represents utilitarianism at its worst. When Gradgrind reminds him that he was educated under his supervision, Bitzer gives a fitting reply ; and in this context, the author reminds us that "it was a fundamental principle of the Gradgrind philosophy that everything was to be paid for. Gratitude was to be abolished, and the virtues springing from it were not to be." Thus we find that Gradgrind's theory of education recoils upon himself. Like Louisa and Tom, Bitzer is a product of Grandgrind's school and, as in their cases, though in a different way, Gradgrind's theory brings only misery to Gradgrind.

II. SLACKBRIDGE

His powers of oratory : inflated rhetoric. Slackbridge is the leader of the factory-workers, a man who organises them into a union to demand their rights from the employers. Like every professional leader, he is an orator of unusual powers. The manner in which he begins his address to his audience of workers, when he is seeking the excommunication of Stephen, reminds us of Antony's oration to the mob in Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar*. "Oh, my friends, the downtrodden operatives of Coketown ! Oh, my friends and fellow-countrymen, the slaves of iron-handed and grinding despotism ! Oh, my friends and fellow-sufferers, fellow-workmen, and fellow-men," this is how he begins. He certainly succeeds in creating an impression upon the audience even though there are some dissident voices. However, as an orator he makes himself only absurd and ridiculous by his pompous, inflated manner of speaking.

His vituperative speech against Stephen. Exaggeration is the keynote of false oratory, and Slackbridge employs exaggeration to the nth degree His impeachment of Stephen Blackpool represents the height of fantastic exaggeration. He compares Stephen's refusal to join the workers' union with the betrayal of Christ by Judas Iscariot ! He describes Stephen as "a traitor and a craven and a recreant." He refers to Stephen's action as humilia-

ting and dastardly. In short, he uses as many terms of opprobrium and abuse as he can think of. His speech is most vituperative. The upshot of his speech is that, by common consent, Stephen is sent to Coventry (that is, ostracized).

Further defaming Stephen. On a later occasion, when Bounderby has announced a reward for "information leading to the arrest of Stephen, Slackbridge gives evidence of his powers of rhetoric once again. Now he describes Stephen in the following manner : "A thief ! A plunderer ! A proscribed fugitive, with a price upon his head ; a fester and a wound upon the noble character of the Coketown operative" ! On this occasion, he proposes that the workers' union should declare that it has already disowned Stephen Blackpool and that Stephen's crime cannot be treated as a reflection upon the workers' community. On this occasion, too, Slackbridge's oratory achieves its purpose.

Slackbridge's role in the plot. Slackbridge's role in the plot, though small, is vital. It is he who gets Stephen ostracised from the workers' community, with the result that, when Bounderby dismisses him, Stephen finds himself utterly helpless. Stephen's decision to quit Coketown altogether is thus partly due to the bitter antagonism of Slackbridge.

An ironic commentary on trade unionism. Dickens has another purpose also in introducing Slackbridge and portraying him in the manner indicated above. Slackbridge is by no means a person for whom we can feel any regard or liking. In fact, he makes himself thoroughly odious to us. We look upon him as an obnoxious fellow, a leader though he might be. In depicting him thus, Dickens is denouncing trade unionism when it goes beyond certain limits. Dickens was undoubtedly a man of socialistic ideas, with the deepest possible humanitarian feelings in his heart. But it is evident that he had no sympathy for demagogues of Slackbridge's kind. Thus the portrayal of Slackbridge is also an important part of the social design of the novel as a whole. This portrayal exposes the intolerance of trade unionism which becomes fanatical in its attitude. Just because a workman, honest and efficient though he may be, refuses to join the workers' union, he is to be ostracised, according to Slackbridge's philosophy. Slackbridge's two speeches are no true oratory but a parody of oratory. In short, the character of Slackbridge is an ironic commentary on trade unionism. The very description of Slackbridge given to us by the author shows the author's contempt for the man. Here is that description : "In many great respects, he was essentially below them (that is, his followers). He was not so honest, he was not so kindly, he was not so good-humoured ; he substituted cunning for their simplicity, and passion for their safe solid sense ; an ill-made, high-shouldered man he contrasted most unfavourably, even in his mongrel dress, with the great body of his hearers in their plain working clothes."

III. MRS. GRADGRIND

A woman of "surpassing feebleness." Mrs. Gradgrind is introduced to us as "a little, thin, white, pink-eyed bundle of shawls, of surpassing feebleness, mental and bodily". In other words, she is an invalid. She is always taking one medicine or another "without any effect". Whenever she shows any symptom of gaining some strength, "she is invariably stunned by some weighty piece of fact tumbling on her". For instance, in the course of a conversation with Bounderby, she does show some sign of energy but the moment Bounderby says that his mother abandoned him and bolted, Mrs. Gradgrind is stunned, and collapses. When Bounderby continues his narrative of his early childhood, Mrs. Gradgrind smiles weakly, giving no other sign of vitality. On this occasion, she "looked (as she always did) like an indifferently executed transparency of a small female figure, without enough light behind it".

A faithful adherent of her husband's views on life. Although there are no signs of any love between Mr. and Mrs. Gradgrind, the wife is a devout believer in her husband's philosophy of "facts", of not allowing children to "wonder" at things, of not permitting the exercise of "fancy", and so on. For instance, when she is told that Louisa and Tom were caught peeping through a tent-hole at the circus, Mrs. Gradgrind says in a grumbling tone : "Dear me ! How can you, Louisa and Thomas !" She even regrets having had a family if her children were to deviate in such a glaring manner from the path prescribed for them by their father who, as we know, is an educational faddist.

A figure of comedy ; completely devoid of fancy. Whenever Mrs. Gradgrind speaks in the course of her short life, we feel amused. Indeed, she is a figure of comedy, though in her case the humour is not cruel or spiteful as it is in the satire directed against some of the other characters. For instance, when she wants to snub any of her children for idling away his or her time, she says : "Go and be somethingological directly." The following description of Mrs. Gradgrind throws much light on her character : "In truth, Mrs. Gradgrind's stock of facts in general was woefully defective. Firstly, she was most satisfactory as a question of figures ; and, secondly, she had no nonsense about her." By "nonsense" here, is meant fancy ; and she was as devoid of fancy as any human being short of an idiot ever is.

Helpless under her husband's reproving eyes. As has already been said, Mrs. Gradgrind is completely devoid of any real energy or vitality. If at all she gathers strength enough to say something, and if that something is disagreeable to her husband, he

looks at her with such disapproving eyes th t she subsides and is rendered speechless. This aspect of Mrs. Gradgrind's life is thus stated by the author : "At about this point Mr. Gradgrind's eye would fall upon her, and under the influence of that wintry piece of fact she would become torpid again."

Some of her most amusing remarks. One of the most comic situations in the novel occurs when Mrs. Gradgrind learns that her husband has prevailed upon Louisa to accept Bounderby's proposal of marriage. Mrs. Gradgrind at this time expresses the hope that Louisa, unlike her mother, will enjoy good health during her married life and that Louisa's head would not begin to split soon after marriage, which was the case with herself. Mrs. Gradgrind then says to Louisa : "However, I give you joy, my dear— and I hope you may now turn all your ological studies to good account, I am sure I do ! I must give you a kiss of congratulation, Louisa, but don't touch my right shoulder, for there is something running down it all day long." And Mrs. Gradgrind amuses us even more when she expresses her distress at not being able to decide how to address her would-be son-in-law : she cannot address him as Mr. Bounderby ; she cannot address him as "Josiah" ; she cannot address him as "my son-in-law Mister." "Then, what am I to call him ?" she asks. Subsequently, we are told that she started addressing him as "J" (short for Josiah).

The mingling of humour and pathos when she is dying. Scenes of death are generally pathetic, if not tragic. However, the account of Mrs. Gradgrind's death is written in such a way that it is more comic than pathetic. Her feeble voice, we are told, at this time sounded so far away in her bundle of shawls that she might have been lying at the bottom of a well. The poor lady was nearer truth than she ever had been. When she is asked by Louisa whether she is in pain, her reply is one which is perhaps one of the most amusing sentences in the whole book : "I think there's a pain somewhere in the room, but I couldn't positively say that I have got it". Another remark which she makes at this time and which amuses us greatly is : "You learnt a good deal, Louisa, and so did your brother. Ologies of all kinds from morning to night. If there is any ology left, of any description, that has not been worn to rags in this house, all I can say is, I hope, I shall never hear its name." She also tells Louisa at this moment that there is something—not an ology at all—that her father has missed or forgotten, but that she does not know what it is. There is a good deal of irony behind this remark, not irony which Mrs. Gradgrind intends but which is intended by the author and understood by the reader.

A rich source of humour. Mrs. Gradgrind has no role at all in the plot of the novel, but her value as a comic character is

great. She is a rich source of unconscious humour, and this humour considerably relieves the bitterness and savagery of the novel as a whole.

IV. MRS. PEGLER

A mysterious woman. Mrs. Pegler is the old woman whom Stephen happens to meet one day when he comes out of Bounderby's house after having discussed his matrimonial troubles with his employer. She is "tall and shapely, though withered by time." Stephen finds her "cleanly and plainly dressed" ; and she seems to have newly come from a journey from somewhere in the countryside because there are traces of mud upon her shoes. She tells Stephen that she has been waiting in the street to have a glimpse of the owner of the house from which he has just emerged. Not having been able to catch a glimpse of the gentleman, she is satisfied to have seen Stephen because the latter has seen the person whom she wanted to see. When she learns that Stephen has worked in that gentleman's factory for a dozen years, she raises Stephen's hand to her lips and kisses it. All this is mysterious behaviour, and we do not understand why this woman has an attitude of adoration towards Bounderby, the owner of the house opposite which this woman was standing.

Anxious to hide herself from Bounderby and Mrs. Bounderby. We meet this woman on another occasion afterwards when she is very keen to catch a glimpse of Bounderby's wife. On this occasion, too, she happens to meet Stephen, and again she has failed to catch a glimpse of the person she was so keen to see. She feels very happy to learn from Stephen that Mrs. Bounderby is young and handsome, with fine, dark eyes. This time Stephen takes the old woman to his lodging and offers her refreshments. But the moment she hears of the possibility of Bounderby's coming to this place, she feels nervous and wishes to hide herself somewhere. However, she feels somewhat reassured on being told that it is not Bounderby but his wife who is coming. Even then she implores Stephen to allow her to remain in a corner of the room without any notice being taken of her when Mrs. Bounderby enters. The mystery of this woman thus becomes deeper still, because her identity still remains unknown to us.

Suspected of being the alleged bank-robber's accomplice. When Stephen is suspected of having committed a robbery at the bank, it is surmised that the old woman who had been seen in his company loitering near the building of the bank must have been an accomplice of Stephen's. Mrs. Sparsit then gets busy trying to trace this old woman and succeeds in finding her in the latter's country abode. Mrs. Sparsit forcibly brings the old woman to Coketown in order to produce her before Bounderby as a partner in the crime of robbery.

Mrs. Pegler, Bounderby's mother. It is now that the mystery is solved. This old woman, whose name is Mrs. Pegler, is Bounderby's mother ! The revelation comes as a great surprise and a great shock to us, especially when she reveals that she had brought up her son Josiah Bounderby with all the affection and love expected of a mother. Bounderby has been giving out that he had been abandoned by his mother when he was still an infant and that he had been left in the irresponsible hands of a drunken grandmother. This entire account which Bounderby has been giving to various people proves to have been a complete fabrication. Mrs Pegler was devoted to her son as a mother normally is. But Bounderby, on rising to prosperity in life, pensioned her off on thirty pounds a year, laying down the condition that she should never come to see him and should never tell people that she was his mother. When she is now produced before Bounderby, she apologises to him for making an appearance here, explaining at the same time that she never came of her own accord but that she had been dragged to this place by Bounderby's housekeeper.

A pathetic figure. When we learn the true facts about Mrs. Pegler and her son, we are filled with deep sympathy for her, and she becomes a pathetic figure in the story. At the same time, she proves to be an unwitting instrument of the exposure of Bounderby's true character as an unnatural kind of son who does not have the least touch of affection in his heart for his own mother. Our contempt for Bounderby is now complete.

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Important Questions With Answers

Q. 1. Discuss the structure of *Hard Times*, pointing out the weaknesses in its plot-construction.

Or

Attempt a critique of Dickens's craftsmanship as exhibited in *Hard Times*.

Ans. A brilliantly plotted novel, producing a sense of inevitability. A number of modern critics have given high praise to *Hard Times* for its tightly organised structure. It has been called "a brilliantly plotted novel". The action in this novel moves on with a sense of single-minded, concentrated energy which is almost unique in Dickens. In reading its story, we are gripped by a sense of inevitability. Dickens here appears as a skilled craftsman, and this novel shows a sense of technique which no other novel of Dickens possesses, not even *Great Expectations*. *Hard Times* is a wonderfully compact novel, free from digressions, superfluous matter, unnecessary details, and comic scenes which Dickens is in the habit of introducing in most of his novels purely to add to the comic effect and without any other justification. One reason for the compactness of this novel is, of course, its brevity which allows no room for irrelevant matter or for any matter connected with the main action only slightly or flimsily.

The main action centring round Mr. Gradgrind or Mr. Utilitarian. There are three separate plot-sequences in *Hard Times*. The main action centres round Mr. Thomas Gradgrind who may be described as Mr. Utilitarian. Mr. Gradgrind is a "man of realities," "a man of facts and calculations," "a man who proceeds upon the principle that two and two are four and nothing over". Gradgrind speaks mathematically, making no allowances for the tender or softer emotions. He conducts all the business of life in a practical manner because this is the way to go ahead, to make money, and to become financially and socially successful according to Victorian standards. He bows to the god of cash-payment, and he brings up his children in accordance with this philosophy. The progress

of the story shows how this utilitarian philosophy works out. Louisa, Tom, and Sissy belong to this main action of the story. Louisa's marriage with the capitalist, Bounderby, proves a disastrous failure. Dickens shows his heroine on the verge of yielding to the temptation of running away with a lover, but successfully overcoming the temptation at the last moment. The wreck of her life is complete ; her father's philosophy has effectively undone her. Tom's life is ruined also. He becomes a gambler and, to repay his gambling debts, robs the bank where he works and throws the blame on Stephen, a worker in Bounderby's factory. Ultimately Stephen's innocence is established, and Tom has to flee to a foreign land in order to escape the clutches of the law. Sissy, like a character in a moral play, illustrates ideas which are diametrically opposed to the utilitarian philosophy taught at Gradgrind's school, a philosophy which she simply cannot imbibe. She plays a vital part in the story of the Gradgrind family, proving immensely helpful to all its members.

The second part of the action centring round Mr. Bounderby. The second part of the action centres about Mr. Bounderby, a hard-hearted and vicious banker and manufacturer. Mr. Bounderby is a personification of utilitarianism in the field of business and industry, and he is also a concrete symbol of the theory of laissez faire. His attitude to his workmen in his factory is governed primarily by a desire to make the maximum possible profits from his business and industry, and he looks upon the modest requirements of his workmen as a demand for turtle soup and venison with a gold spoon. His treatment of his mother shows a complete lack of any sentiments in his heart. The same cold attitude is evident in his relations with his wife Louisa who therefore feels somewhat inclined towards a lover, James Harthouse, yet another symbol of utilitarianism. Bounderby has also a place in the sub-plot based upon his relations with his housekeeper, Mrs. Sparsit, who symbolises the vanity, the snobbery, the hypocrisy, and the deceitfulness of the Victorian upper-classess.

The story of Stephen and Rachel. The third part of the action pertains to Stephen Blackpool, a worker in Bounderby's textile mill. Stephen's conjugal life has been made intolerable to him by a wife who became, early in his married life, a heavy drunkard. He now loves another woman, Rachel, and would like to divorce his wife but, finding it impossible to do so, he lives in a state of frustration, with Rachel providing whatever comfort she can. As Stephen is used by Tom in his scheme to shift responsibility for the theft at the bank, Stephen is connected with the Gradgrind story. Stephen refuses to join the workers' union and is sent to Coventry for this refusal. At the same time, he refuses to act as an informer against the union and is dismissed from his job by his employer, Bounderby. Eventually he dies in an accident, but is able before he dies to exonerate himself from the charge of the robbery at the bank.

The themes or the theses*. These three plot-sequences illustrate Dickens's general plan for revolving his action around his thesis. The thesis itself is, however, wider than the attack on utilitarianism and laissez faire, since it also includes criticism of the educational system (through Gradgrind's emphasis on facts and statistics and his neglect of the emotions and the imagination), criticism of the class distinctions (through the satirical portrayal of Mrs Sparsit), and criticism of the divorce law (through Stephen's inability to get rid of his drunken wife and find happiness with Rachel). Structurally speaking, *Hard Times* has no loose ends everything being woven skilfully into the repetitive moral pattern which constitutes its form.

Two distinct, co-existent elements in the novel. There are two distinct co-existent elements in this novel, a realistic mode of presentation and a Christian-cum-mythical one. In the realistic mode the fore-ground is occupied mainly by Louisa and Gradgrind ; in the other the two great moral characters are Sissy and Stephen, though Rachel cannot be ignored ; Mrs. Sparsit and Bounderby enter both areas, the first living largely in the realistic mode because of her convincing inner monologue and integrated psychology, while Bounderby is an anti-moralist chiefly in the second mode.

Other structural merits. Economy of expression is a striking feature of the structure of *Hard Times* . The usual defects in the novels of Dickens—too many sub-plots, too much melodrama, a shifting focus—are not to be found in *Hard Times*. Barring a little sentimentality in the scenes where Sissy shows her devotion to Louisa and where Stephen's misery is depicted, this novel is singularly free from blemishes against truth. The theme is clear, and the message of the book direct and simple. This message is that the ways of the heart are more important than the ways of the mind. The essence of goodness lies in the service of others and in being helpful to those in distress. The systems of facts and factory which oppose the development of Christian feeling in the individual are exposed and ridiculed.

Undeveloped contrasts, and unfinished business. But the structure of *Hard Times* is by no means perfect. One critic,† for instance, points out that Dickens here does not find sufficient space for full development of his contrasting plot-sequences. Dickens also had difficulty in focusing all his narrative technical resources on his subject. The result is that the novel sometimes gives the effect of choppy episodes, of undeveloped contrasts, and of unfinished business.

Lack of motivation behind Stephen's refusal to join the union. Then there are certain faults in plot-construction. One of

* "theses" : the plural form of "thesis.'

† Earle Davis.

the most glaring of these faults is lack of enough motivation behind Stephen's refusal to join the workers' union. Stephen's genuine and deep sympathy with the workers' cause is fully brought out in the scene in which he is interrogated by Bounderby ; we do not therefore understand what objection he had to joining the union. Normally a person of his kind would be more vocal in voicing the workers' grievances, but Stephen refuses to have anything to do with the union, his only reason being that he had given a promise to someone (to Rachel, of course) that he would not join the union, and that he is of the view that the union activities would lead to nothing. Both his reasons are flimsy and unconvincing.

The industrial conflict not developed. Another fault is that the industrial conflict is not sufficiently dwelt upon ; this conflict is merely indicated. Without going into the matter of the unsatisfactory portrayal of the union leader, Slackbridge, we cannot help feeling that the conflict between the employers and the workers should at least have led to some sort of confrontation showing either the futility of such strife or offering some sort of solution, however partial or limited, to the industrial problem. All this could have been managed in one single chapter.

The growth of Louisa-Harthouse affair not indicated. Another lacuna in the plot is the author's failure to show us any development in the relations of Louisa and Harthouse. Louisa remains a riddle to us and to the lover who is trying to force himself upon her attention. Louisa's relation to Harthouse is never described in any specific terms. It is, therefore, a startling development when we find Louisa rushing out to her house and catching the train to Coketwon, ultimately bursting into her father's presence. Another novelist, or even Dickens himself in another novel, would have dwelt upon the Louisa-Harthouse affair at greater length and given us an account of the conflict going on in Louisa's mind. This too could have been managed in one single chapter which would have added to the psychological value of the book. As it is, Mrs. Sparsit's mind has been presented to us in some detail, while the mental state of Louisa receives no attention from the novelist except when she appears before her father and describes her plight.

Th Stephen-Rachel story not properly integrated with the main action. The Stephen-Rachel story has also been criticised by some critics* as not being closely interwoven with the main action. It has been said that the novelist, by dwelling upon this particular sub-plot, seems to be twisting our arm.

Another flaw. Another matter of detail to which the novelist has paid no attention is Louisa's strange silence under all

* by A.H. Gomme, for instance.

circumstances when she is living with Bounderby. Louisa does not utter a single word of protest or advice to her husband when he dismisses Stephen in an arbitrary manner. Subsequently she pays a secret visit, in Tom's company, to Stephen's lodging in order to express her sympathy with the unjustly dismissed worker and to offer him financial help. This visit has been manipulated by the novelist merely to enable Tom to lure Stephen to the bank a couple of times in order later to put the blame for the robbery on him. It is an unconvincing device which does not at any rate explain why Louisa could not have protested against the dismissal, at least in private when alone with her husband. However, we should not forget that Louisa has on the whole been depicted as a proud and reserved person, as one who is not on terms of any intimacy with her husband so far as his business affairs are concerned. Constituted and brought up as she is, she thinks it futile to intervene when Bounderby dismisses Stephen.

Q. 2. "Dickens's characters derive their life from the fact that they do reveal a certain aspect of real human nature—its individuality". Discuss with reference to *Hard Times*.

Or

Do you think Dickens succeeds in creating living and individual characters in his novel *Hard Times* ?

Or

Write a critical note on Dickens's art of character-portrayal in *Hard Times*.

Ans. Two charges against Dickens's art of character-portrayal. Two common charges against Dickens's art of characterisation in his novels are, firstly, that he is guilty of considerable exaggeration and, secondly, that he does not tell us enough about the inner life of his characters. There is much substance in both these charges. The tendency towards exaggeration leads Dickens often to give us what are known as caricatures ; and his inability to depict the inner states of the minds of his characters renders his character-portrayal somewhat superficial. And yet the fact remains that, next only to Shakespeare, Dickens has given us the largest gallery of characters and that most of his characters are individual human beings, each with a life of his own.

Characters as symbols, and yet individuals. Most of the characters in *Hard Times* are no doubt embodiments of certain ideas or concepts. Most of them have, indeed, a symbolic significance in this novel which has been called a fable or a morality drama. Each character stands for something and represents something ; each is a personification of an abstract principle. And yet we could confidently say that each of these characters is a living individual and

not merely a typical character in the Jonsonian sense. In Jonson's plays, the characters are generally personifications of what came to be known as "humours"; each character there represents a certain humour but nothing more. But here, while we do have personifications of certain abstract principles, each of the characters acquires an individul life of his own and a vitality of his own; each has some peculiarity which distinguishes him or her from the types they would have been without that peculiarity.

Gradgrind and Bounderby as personifications of the utilitarian principle. Gradgrind and Bounderby are clearly and undeniably personifications of what was known as the utilitarian principle in Victorian political economy. Gradgrind represents utilitarianism in its most rigid form in the sphere of education, and, later in the book, in the sphere of his parliamentary activity. His theory of education is based upon the importance of facts, figures, and statistics. This man wants to measure the universe with a pair of compasses; human beings are only arithmetical units in his eyes; he does not attach any importance to instincts, feelings, affections, fancy, and imagination. He does not only run his school in accordance with this theory, but he carries the utilitarian principle into his domestic and family life, bringing up his own children in accordance with this theory, and marrying off his daughter in accordance with it. Bounderby represents the utilitarian principle in business and industry. A banker and manufacturer by profession, he represents monetary greed and an attitude of callousness towards his workmen in the pursuit of wealth. He regards even the modest demands of his workmen as a demand for turtle soup and venison, with a gold spoon; he dismisses Stephen without the least compunction.

Gradgrind and Bounderby sharply distinguished from each other. Although both these men personify the utilitarian principle with its insistence on the practical aspect of things and its pursuit of money as an end in itself, yet they are distinguished from each other in a striking manner, so that each becomes a living individual in his own right. Although they are bosom friends and both are described as being devoid of human sentiments, yet they vastly differ from each other. Gradgrind has a certain degree of compassion in his nature, despite his blatant advocacy of facts and figures. His taking the abandoned Sissy under his protection is evidence of that. Besides, he is capable of changing his views when the results of his actions prove him to have been wrong in his views and attitudes. The sad fate of Louisa and Tom, both of whom suffer, in different ways, the evil consequences of Gradgrind's theory of education, shows to Gradgrind the falsity of his theory so that we find him broken, repentant, and remorseful at the end. Bounderby on the contrary, remains, to the last what he is at the outset; he is inflexible and incapable of change. Despite the exposure of the true circums-

tances of his early life which his housekeeper unwittingly brings about, he remains unembarrassed and unchanged, shameless till the end. He is truly devoid of any human sentiment. Besides, he is different from Gradgrind in another way also. He is a braggart, which Gradgrind is not ; and he is a braggart not in the conventional sense. He may be described as a braggart in the reverse direction ; he brags of his humble birth where another man would have tried to cover up the fact of his humble birth ; rightly does Dickens call him "the bully of humility." His attitude towards Mrs. Sparsit is also one of his distinguishing marks ; he exalts her background as much as he degrades his own, Ruskin said that Bounderby had been overdone so that he is not a convincing person but a dramatic monster. As has already been indicated, the element of exaggeration in the portrayal of Bounderby cannot be denied ; but that does not mean that he fails to convince us. There is nothing impossible about this man who, at the root of his bullying, is a fraud and who goes about declaring himself a self-made man, insensitive to the claims of humanity, self-centred, and selfish. As a critic points out, England is full of Bounderbys ; we might say that the whole world is full of Bounderbys. He is certainly not an incredible character.

Harthouse's individuality. James Harthouse is another character who represents the utilitarian principle but who is, again, an individual in his own right. He is a man bored with life, and he joins the "Hard Fact fellows" to relieve his boredom and not because of any real convictions. He takes to political activity merely as a hobby. The other distinguishing marks of his character are an "assumed honesty in dishonesty," a frank cynicism, and his adopting the motto, "what will be, will be." He is also distinguished from the others by his finding an escape from his boredom in pursuing a married woman. His utilitarianism is apparent from the fact that he pursues Louisa without experiencing any real passion for her. And Harthouse is fully "alive," though in a languid way.

The individuality of Mrs. Sparsit. Utilitarianism, which is the fundamental principle of Gradgrindery, finds different forms in Mrs. Sparsit, Tom, and Bitzer. They are all offshoots of the system which deliberately excludes the outgoing human emotions of love and gratitude. It is difficult to say which of these three specimens is the worst in a moral sense. But there is no doubt that each is widely different from the others, and each has his or her own individuality. Mrs. Sparsit is vain of her aristocratic connections—which she never fails to mention at the least opportunity; she behaves towards her employer in a cringing manner though, in private, she shakes her fist at his portrait and calls him a noodle after he has married Louisa and thus thwarted her own secret ambition of becoming his wife ; she does some good detective work, although it ultimately leads only to her dismissal from her job ; she is hypocrisy personified ; her attitude towards the workers

is as callous as that of her employer and, in this respect at least, she is exactly like him.

The individual character of Tom. Utilitarianism in Tom takes a different form. In order to compensate himself for the rigidity of his early upbringing, he begins to lead a life of pleasure and incurs heavy debts. In order to repay these debts, he feels compelled to rob the bank of which he is an employee. In justification of his action in misappropriating the bank money he uses the phraseology of his own father who had always talked in terms of percentages and certain other arithmetical calculations. A certain percentage of persons holding positions of trust and responsibility must prove to be dishonest, says Tom. Tom's utilitarianism is also seen in his ingratitude towards his sister and in his being easily used as a tool and as a source of information by Harthouse.

Bitzer distinguished from the others. Bitzer is entirely a different man. Whereas Tom grows to be a spendthrift, Bitzer practises a rigid economy in his life. Bitzer's governing principle is self-interest as it is his employer Bounderby's. To gain advancement in life, he brushes aside all such obligations as gratitude ; he looks upon life as a bargain. He has duly learnt Gradgrind's philosophy according to which "every inch of the existence of mankind, from birth to death, was to be a bargain across a counter." And ultimately he does get the post in the bank to which he had been aspiring.

The individuality of Louisa. Louisa develops along different lines altogether when she grows up. She is certainly influenced by the utilitarian principle in deciding to marry Bounderby but soon she begins to regret the decision and, as soon as a lover appears on the scene, she begins to toy with the idea of seeking an escape from her husband. However, in returning to her father's home she shows the triumph of womanly virtue over temptation and she surely wins our hearts by this action.

Stephen and Rachel. According to some critics, both Stephen and Rachel are intended to be representative figures symbolizing goodness and passive suffering. But this approach is not sound. These two are individual figures. Stephen is no representative workman ; otherwise he would not have refused to join the workers' union. And Rachel is no ordinary "other woman" in a man's life. Her character is revealed to us through various episodes—her snatching away the bottle of poison from Stephen's wife ; her spirited defence of Stephen when he is defamed by Bounderby ; her reaction to the discovery of Stephen's hat on the brink of a deserted mine-pit ; her friendship with Sissy ; and so on.

Sissy and Mr. Sleary. Sissy surely symbolizes all the ideas opposed to the utilitarian philosophy which is taught at Gradgrind's

school and which she is unable to imbibe. But, though a symbol, she is an individual too. Sissy's faith in her father never falters, and her devotion to the Gradgrind family never wavers. Her actions in driving away Harthouse from Coketown and helping Tom's escape lift her far higher than the level of a mere symbolic figure. She shares with Rachel the unique distinction of being a woman whom the author has almost idealized but who yet remains a reality in our eyes. Mr. Sleary, to whom belongs the honour of stating the moral of the whole novel, is another individual very much alive and very much himself. His loquacity, his lisp, his perpetually being neither drunk nor sober, his view of the circus as a necessity in the life of people—all these endow him with a life all his own.

Q. 3. Reproduce the picture of Victorian Society which emerges from your reading of *Hard Times*.

Or

What light does the novel *Hard Times* throw on the conditions of life in its various aspects during the Victorian age ?

Ans. A powerful expression of some aspects of Victorian life. Victorian life was, on the whole, dominated by Benthamite utilitarianism. England was being rapidly industrialised, and machinery was coming to occupy the foremost position in English national life. The development of industry was giving rise to problems between capital and labour, that is, between employers and workers, and the trade union movement was gaining momentum. It was also a period when snobbery and hypocrisy held a sway over the minds of the upper class people. These, and certain other aspects of Victorian life, receive a powerful expression at the hands of Dickens in *Hard Times*, though for obvious reasons Dickens greatly exaggerates what seemed to him to be the evils and abuses of the Victorian industrial and utilitarian life.

Educational theory in the Victorian age. Our reading of this novel acquaints us, first of all, with the educational theory which held the ground during the Victorian age. This educational theory was based primarily on facts, figures, and statistics. Of this educational theory, Gradgrind is the principal champion, ably assisted by the government inspector and the new school teacher whom we meet in Chapter 2 of Book I. Gradgrind wants that the boys and the girls in his school should be taught nothing but facts. According to him, facts alone are wanted in life ; the minds of reasoning animals, that is human beings, can be formed only upon facts. Gradgrind is described as a man of realities, an eminently practical man, a man of facts and calculations, a man who proceeds upon the principle that two and two are four and nothing

over. He addresses one of the pupils in his school not by her name but as "girl number twenty." He has no need for the first-hand knowledge of horses which this girl possesses. Bitzer's definition of a horse—a graminivorous quadruped with forty teeth and hard hoofs to be shod with iron— is the proper way to describe that animal. The government inspector, as well as Gradgrind, is opposed to any exercise of the fancy. Wall-paper must not have representations of horses on it, and carpets must not have flower designs on them, because these would be contrary to literal facts. The new schoolmaster has at the tips of his fingers all the important facts of etymology, syntax, prosody, astronomy, geography, algebra, vocal music, lawn-surveying, etc. However, this man, says Dickens, would have taught much more and much better if he had only learnt a little less.

The educational theory, one aspect of Victorian utilitarianism. Gradgrind gives to his own children an education strictly in accordance with the theory stated above. No child of his had ever seen a face in the moon ; no child of his had ever learnt the silly jingle, "Twinkle, twinkle, little star ; how I wonder what you are !" The Gradgrind children have their respective cabinets in various departments of science. None of them is allowed to wonder at anything, because there are facts which should satisfy them. Gradgrind feels disappointed when two of his children are caught by him deviating from the educational code according to which they are being brought up. His own "metallurgical Louisa" and his own "mathematical Tom" are guilty of feeling inquisitive about the circus which is regarded by Gradgrind as a triviality not deserving any attention. Mrs. Gradgrind has also learnt her husband's theory to the extent of urging her children not to waste time in "wondering" at things but to go and be "somethingological" directly. In short, the educational theory of the Victorian age emphasised the gathering of facts with a view to developing one's reason, and it completely ignored the need for a cultivation of the human imagination, feelings, sentiments and affections. This educational theory was one aspect of utilitarianism.

Bounderby's character, another aspect of Victorian utilitarianism. Another aspect of utilitarianism is to be seen in the character of Bounderby, manufacturer and banker. He is a close friend of Gradgrind, and has an equally practical mind. But Bounderby goes one step further ; there is no human touch in him at all, as there certainly is in Gradgrind. Bounderby is opposed to Sissy being adopted by Gradgrind who is moved by human feelings to take that girl under his protection. Bounderby shows the extreme callousness of a thorough-going rationalist by speaking to little Sissy bluntly about her father having abandoned her. As a heartless capitalist, he feels no sympathy at all with the workmen. Even the minimum requirements of the workmen are described by

him as their desire to be fed on turtle soup and venison, with a gold spoon. When Stephen refuses to act as an informer against the workers' union, he is instantly dismissed by Bounderby who now calls him a trouble-maker. Afterwards, he suspects Stephen of having robbed the bank, and he refuses to give credence to Rachel's story of Louisa's visit to Stephen's lodging. Indeed, there seems to be no human touch in this monster of utilitarianism.

The utilitarian approach to marriage. Bounderby's getting married to Louisa reinforces our impression of him as a man devoid of any human emotions. Both Louisa's father and Louisa's would-be husband show themselves to be utilitarians even in a matter where feelings and emotions should have the utmost importance. Gradgrind tries by quoting statistics to convince Louisa of the desirability of her agreeing to marry Bounderby. The scene in which he succeeds in getting her consent to the proposed marriage is a triumph of the utilitarian approach to life and, although the element of exaggeration is certainly present here, the picture of Victorian society presented to us here is undoubtedly true in its essentials.

Industrial ugliness and capitalistic greed. The novel also contains graphic pictures of the ugliness of industrialism which was raising its head in the Victorian age. Coketown is described as a town of machinery and tall chimneys out of which unending columns of smoke rose upwards for ever and ever. The streets of the town, whether large or small, are exactly like one another ; the people are also exactly like one another : they all go in and out at the same hours, with the same sound upon the same pavements, to do the same work. Thus the monotony of the workmen's life is fully conveyed to us. The need for any relaxation or physical relief is never realised by the employers. In fact the workmen are not men at all ; they are "hands," so many hundred hands, "so many hundred horse steam power." These men are not supposed to have any souls ; they are hands who have to work upon "the crashing, smashing, tearing mechanisms, day in and day out." Time goes on in this industrial town like its own machinery : so much material used, so much fuel consumed, so much money made. The man who makes money through the labours of these hands regards the smoke of the chimneys as meat and drink for the capitalist. Speaking to Harthouse, Bounderby describes this smoke as "the healthiest thing in the world in all respects, and particularly for the lungs." Any sympathy for the workmen is regarded by this capitalist as "humbugging sentiment" ; he is not at all prepared, as he puts it again and again, to feed them on turtle soup and venison with a gold spoon. (It is noteworthy, too, that while depicting industrial ugliness Dickens shows his awareness of the romantic side of machinery. He sees the lighted mill by night as a "fairy palace" which suggests that the factory has more to it than dirt, monotony, and oppression).

Mrs. Sparsit as a representative of the Victorian upper middle class : her snobbery, vanity, hypocrisy, jealousy, spiteful nature. According to the picture of Victorian society which this novel contains, money was decidedly the most important thing in life, and Bounderby is a personification of the greed for money. According to the same picture, snobbery or the importance of the class distinctions came only next to money. Bounderby feels proud of the fact that his housekeeper, Mrs. Sparsit, is a lady of an aristocratic background, while Mrs. Sparsit herself never misses an occasion to mention the fact that her husband was a Powler (that is, a person belonging to an ancient, aristocratic family). The aristocratic origin of Mrs. Sparsit seems to confer upon Bounderby a social distinction of which he is always bragging. In fact, Bounderby keeps trying to exalt Mrs. Sparsit's family background just as he keeps boasting of his own humble birth and his being a self-made man. Bounderby sees to it, of course, that, when there is any meeting in Coketown, speakers never fail to sing his praises. He constantly refers to himself as "Josiah Bounderby of Coketown". His vanity as a self-made man and as a capitalist is equalled only by his housekeeper's vanity in being the widow of a Powler and being related to Lady Scadgers. Nor must we ignore the hypocrisy of this lady of aristocratic connections ; she humours, flatters, and cringes to Bounderby on all occasions and at all times in his presence, but inwardly she feels a contempt for him, especially after he gets married to Louisa thus thwarting her own secret ambition ; and when alone, she shakes her fist at Bounderby's portrait and calls him a "noodle". The snobbery of this woman is seen also in not allowing her salary to be called salary or wages but "annual compliment". She makes use of the light porter, Bitzer, as a kind of spy to whom she gives a Christmas gift every year for the service he renders to her. He supplies to her information as to what goes on in the factories and at the bank. Furthermore, this lady, the widow of a Powler, is a most wonderful woman for prowling about Bounderby's house : she observes all the movements of Louisa and Harthouse with the eyes of a hawk ; she is not ashamed of eavesdropping ; she acts as a regular spy, chasing Louisa under the impression that Louisa is going to run away with Harthouse, and she even tracks the old woman, Mrs. Pegler, to her country cottage. This woman has the makings of a really great police detective. Nor is there any doubt that, allowing for the expected exaggeration from Dickens's pen, she represents the real character of the English upper middle-class during the Victorian period.

Trade union activities. The trade union activities of the time are represented in this novel by Slackbridge, a shameless agitator, who not only organises the workers against the employers but also prevails upon the union to ostracise Stephen for having refused to join the union. We do not see this trade union leader in a favourable light at all. He speaks to his followers in an overbearing

manner, exaggerating and distorting the whole situation in so far as it relates to Stephen, and misleading them with his inflated rhetoric.

The rigidity of divorce laws. Dickens has also depicted here the rigidity of the divorce laws of the time. Stephen finds it impossible to get rid of his drunken wife and to start a new chapter with Rachel. As Bounderby says, Stephen will have to go to Doctors' Commons with a suit ; he would have to go to the House of Lords with a suit ; he would have to get an Act of Parliament to enable him to marry again ; and it would cost him something like fifteen hundred pounds, perhaps twice the amount. Rightly does Stephen say that it is "all a muddle", "a muddle altogether." The hypocrisy of both Bounderby and Mrs. Sparsit is once again seen in the way in which Bounderby tells Stephen that he married his wife for better and for worse, while Mrs. Sparsit shows her sense of shock at what she considers the impiety of the common people represented by Stephen who wants to divorce his wife.

The sad consequences of utilitarianism. The sad consequences of utilitarianism are to be seen in the fate which Louisa meets in her married life, the wrecking of Tom's career, and the self-interest which governs the actions of Bitzer. Harthouse, another specimen of utilitarianism, though different from Bounderby, manages to gain a place in Louisa's heart by his machinations and his devices, and she saves herself only at the last moment. But in the failure of her married life and her return to her father's home lie the ashes of Gradgrind's utilitarian philosophy. Tom takes to evil courses, going to the length of committing a robbery at the bank, and having ultimately to flee from the country. Bitzer thinks that, having paid his fees at the school when he was a student there, he owes nothing at all to Gradgrind because, after all, Gradgrind's philosophy of utilitarianism does not permit any gratitude.

Q. 4. "As a critique of the Benthamite utilitarian ethics, *Hard Times* is a typical novel of protest." Discuss this statement in the light of your knowledge of the Victorian period.

Or

Examine *Hard Times* as a denunciation of utilitarianism and the laissez faire theory.

Or

Discuss Dickens as social reformer with special reference to *Hard Times*.

Or

Examine *Hard Times* as a social novel.

Ans. Attack on the very basic assumptions of industrial England. As J.W. Beach points out, Dickens in *Hard Times* attacks the very basic assumptions, the characteristic ideology, of industrial England. This novel, says Beach, is a dramatisation of what Carlyle took to be the meaning of utilitarianism and of the orthodox liberal system of laissez faire. This novel clearly shows the role of Dickens as a critic of social structures and as a social reformer.

The meaning of utilitarianism and of laissez faire. "Utilitarianism" owes its full theoretical development to Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) who said that society should aim at the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Bentham held that the aim of life was happiness ; and this happiness-philosophy made an immediate appeal to the superficial kind of thinking which is known as common sense. It was this happiness-philosophy that came to be known as "utilitarianism" because this philosophy emphasised the importance of material goods and seemed to ignore completely the moral and spiritual needs of human beings. According to this philosophy, if the amount of happiness secured was equal, then gambling was as good as poetry. It also meant that the happiness of a thoroughly selfish life was equal to, or even greater than, the happiness of an unselfish life. To the principle that society and its laws should aim at the greatest happiness of the greatest number, Bentham added a second principle, namely that every man was the best judge of his own interests. This second principle led to the formulation of a policy that came to be called laissez faire, meaning that people should be left free to act for themselves.

Self-complacency and greed for money also criticized by Dickens. The theory of utilitarianism was severely criticized by philosophers like Carlyle who were believers in the moral and spiritual values of life. The principle of laissez faire became also, in course of time during the Victorian age, a term of abuse in the vocabulary of socialism because it stood for governmental refusal to intervene, in the cause of social justice, to protect the weak against the strong, and to allow individuals to pursue their own selfish interests. *Hard Times* shows Dickens's antagonism to both utilitarianism and laissez faire. Dickens also attacks here that self-complacency which was a marked characteristic of Victorian society. Dickens is critical, too, of the greed for money which he regarded as the root of most evils. In novels like *Dombey and Son*, *Our Mutual Friend*, and *Great Expectations*, this view of money finds an equally emphatic expression.

Gradgrind, a personification of the utilitarian principle in his theory of education and in his upbringing of his children. The utilitarian principle finds its exponents and champions in the two leading characters of *Hard Times*, Gradgrind and

Bounderby. Gradgrind's theory of education is evidently an offshoot of his utilitarian attitude to life. This man emphasises the importance of facts, and fails to attach any importance to feelings and emotions. He wants to develop the reasoning faculty of the pupils in his school and, to that end, he exhorts the new schoolmaster to teach the boys and the girls in his model school facts, and facts alone, and to root out everything else. Gradgrind is a man of realities, a man of facts and calculations, a man who proceeds upon the principle that two and two are four and nothing over. This "eminently practical man" goes about with a rule, a pair of scales, and the multiplication table always in his pocket, because life and human beings are matters of facts and figures for him. He addresses Sissy as "girl number twenty" and the definition of a horse in his view must take into account such facts as the number of this animal's feet, teeth, and similar other details, while the first-hand knowledge of a horse which Sissy happens to have is of no account to him. Boys and girls must not exercise their fancy, because facts do not permit the use of the fancy : for this reason, carpets must not have representations of flowers on them, and wall-paper must not have representations of horses on it. The new schoolmaster engaged by Gradgrind is himself a product of the same theory of education and has accumulated countless facts pertaining to a large number of the branches of knowledge. Dickens explicitly condemns this kind of schoolmaster, when he says about him : "If he had only learnt a little less, how infinitely better he might have taught much more." Gradgrind has a matter-of-fact home (Stone Lodge) and looks forward to "making an arithmetical figure in Parliament." He brings up his own children in accordance with his theory of education. Being an eminently practical man, he does not allow his children to wonder at anything ; he does not allow them to learn the usual nursery rhymes ; he does not allow them to see a man in the moon ; he takes every possible precaution also to suppress their natural instincts. He regards the circus as a triviality, and severely rebukes his "metallurgical Louisa" and his "mathematical Tom" for having felt inquisitive about what goes on inside a circus. These children are fed only upon facts and are starved of the opportunities to develop their imagination and feelings. No wonder that Tom feels sick of the kind of life that he has been forced to lead under the paternal roof and looks forward to the day when he will compensate himself for what is being denied to him now. Mrs. Gradgrind fully cooperates with her husband and keeps urging the children not to wonder at anything but to go and be "somethingological" directly. So utilitarian is Gradgrind that, even in the matter of Louisa's marriage, he does not see any need to take into account Louisa's feelings ; he considers only the available statistics and comes to the conclusion that the disparity of age between Louisa and Bounderby can safely be ignored. The interview between Gradgrind and Louisa, when he puts before her Bounderby's proposal of marriage, is fraught with irony, and is a powerful attack on Gradgrind's utilitarianism.

Bounderby, an embodiment of utilitarianism and laissez faire. Bounderby, banker and industrialist, is another embodiment of the utilitarian principle ; he illustrates the principle of laissez faire. Bounderby is described as a "man perfectly devoid of sentiment." While Gradgrind does show signs of human feeling by taking the abandoned Sissy under his protection and he certainly changes his outlook upon life by the time the story ends, Bounderby shows no signs of any human feeling and remains till the end what he is at the beginning. Bounderby is a man "made out of a coarse material" ; he constantly boasts of his being a self-made man ; he looks upon his workmen as tools by using which in the proper manner he can enrich himself. Bounderby is proud of having a housekeeper with aristocratic connections and never tires of exalting this lady's background just as he never tires of insisting upon his own humble birth. He is frankly contemptuous of the needs, requirements, and demands of his workmen, because he thinks that these people would not be satisfied with anything less than turtle soup and venison, with a gold spoon. His treatment of Stephen, both when Stephen seeks his guidance in the matter of his domestic life and when he is called upon to supply inside information about the activities of the workers' union, shows his utter callousness. He dismisses Stephen from employment without realising the enormity of the damage he is doing to a man whom he himself recognised as a "steady hand". Wealth is all that matters to him ; he fully represents that greed for money which Dickens condemned so much. He regards industrial smoke as "meat and drink" for the workers and for the factory-owners ; this smoke is in his opinion the healthiest thing in the world in all respects, and particularly for the lungs. The monotonous labour of the workers is described by him as "the pleasantest work there is, the lightest work there is, and the best-paid work there is." There is no room in his thinking for any improvement in the working conditions of his labour force. The only improvement that is possible now is to lay down Turkey carpets on the floors of the factories. Dickens's portrayal of Bounderby is as severe a condemnation of utilitarianism as could be imagined from the pen of a great satirist.

Harthouse's character, his unemotinal pursuit of Louisa. The character of James Harthouse is yet another illustration of the utilitarian principle, though in a different way. This man is feeling bored with everything that he has tried in life ; eventually he joins the sect of "Hard Fact fellows" of whom Gradgrind is one of the chief representatives. Harthouse does not believe in the virtues of benevolence and philanthropy ; his attitude is one of "assumed honesty in dishonesty". Coming to Coketown, he begins to look upon Louisa as an object of his planned conquest, and goes about his purpose, using every device and strategem that he can think of. What is to be noted in this whole game of his is that he is not in love with Louisa, being utterly incapable of any genuine or deep sentiment ; he pursues her merely as a sport ; he is a typical

product of the kind of utilitarianism that prevailed in Victorian society.

Louisa's life wrecked by her father's utilitarianism. The scathing criticism of utilitarianism is implied also in the manner in which Louisa, Tom, and Bitzer fare ultimately in life as a result of the kind of education they have received. Louisa agrees to marry Bounderby because of her father's rational analysis of Bounderby's proposal and because of her own utilitarian motive in promoting the interests of her brother Tom who is employed in Bounderby's bank. Louisa is unable to assert herself against her father's philosophy, because her capacity for self-assertion has been crushed by years of training to which she has been subjected in her father's home and in her father's school. When Harthouse begins to pay compliments to her, Dickens thus describes the effect upon Louisa : "Upon a nature long accustomed to self-suppression, the Harthouse philosophy came as a relief and justification." Eventually, of course, Louisa finds her life completely wrecked and she puts the blame squarely on her father who fully accepts the responsibility.

Tom's self-justification on the basis of utilitarian statistics. Tom, reacting against the rigidity of his utilitarian upbringing and in order to compensate himself, takes to evil courses, going to the extent of robbing the bank of which he is an employee. His life is wrecked, too, and the manner in which he explains his conduct shows how, as in the case of Louisa, Gradgrind's philosophy has rebounded upon himself. Says Tom to his father : "So many people are employed in situations of trust ; so many people, out of so many, will be dishonest. I have heard you talk, a hundred times, of it being a law. How can I help laws ? You have comforted others with such things, father. Comfort yourself." This is the strongest possible ironic commentary on the kind of statistics that Gradgrind used to advocate.

Bitzer's conduct governed wholly by the utilitarian principle. Bitzer is yet another illustration of the disastrous consequences of the utilitarian approach to life. Bitzer has grown into a young man without any feelings or sentiments ; he is not even prepared to marry in order to rear a family ; he believes in the most rigid economy, not only saving his Christmas gratuity but also saving a certain sum regularly from his wages. Besides, self-interest has now become his governing principle. In order to gain promotion in the bank, he would not mind sacrificing Tom by handing him over to Bounderby to be prosecuted for robbery. When Gradgrind reminds Bitzer of having been educated at his school, Bitzer retorts that his schooling was paid for, that it was a bargain which ended with his leaving the school. On this occasion, too, Dickens makes an ironic commentary on Gradgrind's philosophy according to which everything is to be paid for, nobody is ever to give anybody anything without a price, gratitude is to be abolished and

every inch of the existence of mankind from birth to death is to be a bargain across a counter. This is the kind of attitude to life which results from the practice of utilitarianism.

[**Important Note.** In a discussion of *Hard Times* as a social novel or of Dickens as a social reformer in this novel, we have to add the following points to the material provided above : (*i*) Dickens's criticism of the rigidity of divorce laws implied in the story of Stephen Blackpool ; (*ii*) Dickens's criticism of the hypocrisy and false pride of the upper classes as represented in the portrayal of Mrs. Sparsit ; and (*iii*) Dickens's condemnation of trade unionism as reflected in his portrayal of Slackbridge. These three points should be elaborated, and the material offered above should in that case be compressed proportionately.]

Q. 5. "A tract against the scientific and pragmatic education." Is this a valid criticism of *Hard Times* ?

Or

Comment upon Dickens's attack on the contemporary educational theory and upon the validity of this attack.

Ans. Not a "tract" but a great novel. There is no doubt at all that *Hard Times* contains a scathing, satirical attack upon the kind of scientific and pragmatic education that was supposed by Dickens to be prevalent in English schools of his time. But the use of the word "tract" for a great novel is certainly unfair. Besides, the theme of the novel is not confined to the utilitarian theory of education of the time ; it is much wider in scope. *Hard Times* is a great novel which exhibits Dickens's creative power including his originality in character-portrayal and his gifts of wit and humour. It also demonstrates Dickens's capacity for building up a plot various strands of which are closely interwoven so as to produce an effect of a structural unity.

Condemnation of the scientific and pragmatic kind of education. A denunciation of the scientific and pragmatic kind of education that is believed to have held the ground in the Victorian age is certainly to be found in this novel. By a scientific and pragmatic education we mean an education which aims at developing the mind or intellect of the growing child by feeding him upon facts and not allowing him to cultivate his emotions and his imagination. Now this exactly is the educational theory of Gradgrind who runs a model school in an industrial town called Coketown.

Facts alone necessary. We meet Gradgrind in the very opening chapter where we find him urging the new schoolmaster with a ridiculous name to teach "facts" and only facts to his pupils. "Facts alone are wanted in life," says Gradgrind to the

new schoolmaster, "Plant nothing else and root out everything else." The author describes the pupils in this class as little vessels ready to have gallons and gallons of facts poured into them until they are filled to the brim.

Ironic account of Gradgrind's theory of education. Dickens's ironic description of Gradgrind is intended to make fun of the kind of educational theory of which he is the advocate. Gradgrind is described as a man of realities, as a man of facts and calculations, as an eminently practical man, as a man who proceeds upon the principle that two and two are four and nothing over. This man goes about with a rule, a pair of scales, and the multiplication table always in his pocket, ready to weigh and measure "any parcel of human nature". The boys and girls in the class-room are to him little pitchers who are to be filled with facts. He addresses one of the pupils in the class not by her name but as "girl number twenty". He does not want from this girl the kind of first-hand knowledge that she has acquired about horses by having lived among them. He wants the kind of definition that Bitzer offers of a horse : "Quadruped, graminivorous, with forty teeth, hard hoofs requiring to be shod with iron." This definition is greatly amusing to us because of the manner in which facts have been gathered and presented by Bitzer who is sharply distinguished from girl number twenty whose name is Cecilia Jupe, or Sissy for short. The contrast between Bitzer and Sissy is significant, not only as regards their respective conceptions of a horse but also as regards their physical appearance.

No need of fancy ; only facts. The satire on education based upon facts and statistics continues with the government inspector's pointing out to the pupils the undesirability of having wall-paper with representations of horses on it, and carpets with representations of flowers on them. When Sissy mentions the word "fancy" the government inspector warns her against ever making use of that faculty. Fact, fact, fact, says the government inspector, and the words are repeated by Gradgrind. The government inspector emphasises the need of facts to the point of absurdity. "We hope to have before long a board of fact, composed of commissioners of fact, who will force the people to be a people of fact, and of nothing but fact. You must discard the word fancy altogether," says this official.

The new schoolmaster satirized. The new schoolmaster is also described in a satirical manner so as to expose the absurdity of the kind of education which he has received and which he will impart to his pupils. He has been produced, with about one hundred and forty other schoolmasters, "by the same factory, on the same principles, like so many pianoforte legs." His head is crammed with facts pertaining to a score of sciences, and he has been made to study several languages. And the author's

comment on this schoolmaster is : "Rather overdone ! If he had only learnt a little less, how infinitely better he might have taught much more !"

The upbringing of the Gradgrind children attacked. The attack on this kind of education continues in the author's account of the manner in which Gradgrind is bringing up his own children. None of his children had ever seen a face in the moon. None of them had ever learnt the silly jingle, "Twinkle, twinkle, little star ; how I wonder what you are !" None of his children had ever known wonder on the subject ; in fact they are always urged never to wonder at anything, just as they are urged never to use their fancy. Gradgrind lives in a matter-of-fact home, and his ambition is "to make an arithmetical figure in Parliament", an ambition which is subsequently fulfilled. His hcme has small cabinets in various departments of science, and the author satirically refers to his daugther as his "metallurgical Louisa" and to his son as his "mathematical Thomas". It comes something like a shock to Gradgrind that these two children should feel inquisitive about such a triviality as the circus which is giving its performances in the town and a visit to which would be a violation of his educational code. In other words, his system of education excludes from its purview such pastimes as the circus. No wonder these children are growing up with their powers of imagination starved and stunted. There is no scope for them to develop their instincts, feelings, and emotions. Gradgrind himself is described as a man "perfectly devoid of sentiments".

The unhappiness of Louisa and Tom under the parental roof. Louisa and Tom are most unhappy with the kind of atmosphere in which they are being brought up under their father's roof. Tom tells his sister that he is sick of life in this "jaundiced jail" and that, on growing up, he will compensate himself for all that is being denied to him now. Louisa's answer to this is, "It's a great pity, Tom. It's very unfortunate for both of us." Louisa often sits at home, staring at the fire, lost in her thoughts. Even their mother keeps urging Louisa and Tom to go and be "somethingological" instead of wondering at things.

The damage done by this kind of one-sided education. The damage that this kind of education can do is amply demonstrated by subsequent developments in the novel. Gradgrind quotes statistics to prove that a disparity between the ages of a man and a woman is no bar to their getting married, and in this way argues Louisa into accepting Bounderby's proposal of marriage. Louisa's marriage with Bounderby proves, of course, disastrous and she just stops short cf running away with a lover when one appears on the scene. As for Tom, he fully "compensates" himself for the rigid discipline of facts and figures to which he was subjected in his early years. He takes, among other things, to gambling, gets into debt, robs

the bank where he is employed, and has to escape to a foreign country in order to save himself from the clutches of the law. Gradgrind pays heavily for the defective, one-sided kind of education that he gave to his children and to others as well, and he is broken-hearted at the end. Tom, in self-justification, employs the very jargon which his father used to employ as an educationist. Another product of Gradgrind's school, Bitzer, is governed purely by ideas of utility according to which self-interest is supreme, and gratitude is a virtue not to be practised at all. All these persons—Louisa, Tom, and Bitzer—are a sad commentary on the scientific, pragmatic, utilitarian education of the time.

Sissy uninfluenced by this system of education. Sissy happily escapes the consequences of this system of education because she never could learn the facts which were forced upon her. She made no progress at the school and could not imbibe the economic theories and facts that were the staple diet offered to pupils in Gradgrind's model school. Sissy remains human till the end, and it is through her that the Gradgrind family is saved from some of of the misfortunes that would have befallen it but for Sissy's emotional attachment to it.

Not a tract but a work of art. Thus Dickens is pleading in this novel for a balanced development of the head and the heart, the power of reasoning and the capacity to feel, the mental faculty and the instincts or affections. To sacrifice the instincts and affections for the sake of the development of the intellect means dehumanising the pupils and robbing them of what is most precious in human nature. But, although the propaganda purpose of the writer is obvious, it would be totally wrong to call this novel a "tract." A tract is a pamphlet in which facts are presented in a dry, scientific manner, in the manner in which Gradgrind himself and his new schoolmaster offered facts to their pupils. But Dickens's novel conveys Dickens's educational ideas to us by means of an interesting story, employing all the creative resources of the language. The kind of wit and humour we have in this novel is never to be found in any tract ; the pathetic situations, (Louisa's tragic plight, Gradgrind's unutterable misery) which move us so deeply are never to be met with in a tract. Then there is the portrayal of characters who are not only symbols but living individuals. Furthermore, the novel is not confined to this one theme only. It also illustrates the practice of utilitarianism in business and industry ; it depicts the conflict between capital and labour ; it describes trade-unionism and its snags ; it illustrates the rigidity of the laws governing divorce with reference to the very moving story of Stephen and Rachel ; it gives us most amusing pictures of persons like Mrs. Sparsit and James Harthouse. No, *Hard Times* is certainly no tract ; it is a work of art.

Realism. Some critics have doubted the authenticity of the picture of the educational system that is offered by Dickens in the

opening chapter and called this picture historically inaccurate. They are of the opinion that Dickens has given us a greatly exaggerated and distorted picture. Others have, however, pointed out the historical truth of this picture. It is noteworthy that, although the novel starts with a school and is much concerned with educational issues, only the first two brief chapters actually take place in the class-room. The schoolmaster never appears again, though there are a few references to him afterwards. Gradgrind's questions have been found to correspond with those that were generally asked in schools of the time. Dickens's sketch of the new schoolmaster was also based on his first-hand knowledge of teachers produced by training colleges of the time. The disquiet that Dickens expresses was in those days widespread both among laymen and professionals including inspectors, headmasters, and some principals of the colleges themselves. There was a general notion that teaching in schools was too little adapted to the real needs and capacities of the children. It was a common practice in schools to concentrate on the mind and memory instead of developing the whole child. If, therefore, there is exaggeration in Dickens's picture, it is the exaggeration of conditions which actually existed, and it is the kind of exaggeration which is fully justified in satire.

Q. 6. How far is it appropriate to call *Hard Times a* a moral fable or a morality play? Give reasons for your answer.

Or

Write a note on the use of symbolism in *Hard Times*.

Ans. A strong moral purpose behind this novel. Although it is not appropriate to describe a work of art, which *Hard Times* undoubtedly is, as a moral fable or a morality play, yet the fact remains that there is a strong moral intention behind this novel. *Hard Times* is a satirical attack on some of the evils and vices of Victorian society. Satire has always a corrective purpose and is therefore basically moral in its approach to the subjects it deals with. Apart from that, there are passages of direct moralising in this novel.

Characters as symbols of certain moral traits. In order to give a concrete shape to his moral purpose, Dickens in this novel uses the characters here as symbols. Almost every character in this novel is an embodiment of a certain idea or concept or principle, good or bad. In fact, there are two groups of symbolic characters : one group symbolizing certain objectionable features of Victorian life, and the other group symbolizing certain moral qualities of which we heartily approve. These two groups of characters, symbolizing opposite principles, are confronted with each other, and it is this confrontation that constitutes the focus of interest in the

novel. The characters here are therefore like the dramatis personae in a morality play ; there is an allegorical intention behind the character-portrayal. However, this novel is different from a moral fable or a morality play in one striking respect. While the characters in a moral fable or a morality play are purely embodiments of certain qualities, good or bad, in this novel the characters, in addition to their function as symbols of certain good or bad qualities, are also individuals in their own right. Each character here is made to live as a separate individual, sharply distinguished from the others ; yet their symbolic roles cannot be questioned.

The evils and abuses symbolized by one group of characters. One group of characters here symbolizes certain evils, abuses, and harmful institutions, and certain vices. The attack on these evils and vices is made through characters who are identified with those evils and vices and who earn our dislike and hatred. Thus Gradgrind symbolizes the utilitarian theory of education. His excessive emphasis on facts and statistics, and his complete disregard for the value of instincts, sentiments, and fancy or imagination, show him to be an embodiment of a certain system of education that leads to disastrous results which thus demonstrate in a tangible form the absurdity of that system of education. Bounderby, banker and manufacturer, is a symbol of the utilitarian economic theory and the theory of laissez faire which held the ground in the Victorian age. This man represents greed for money and callous inhumanity in actual practice. The actions of this man are determined purely by self-interest ; he is devoid of any sympathy for his workers whose minimum requirements are described by him as demands for turtle soup and venison—with a gold spoon. His dismissal of Stephen shows him to be a most arbitrary kind of employer. Then there is Louisa who becomes a symbol of the suffering to which a human being may be subjected as a consequence of the wrong kind of upbringing of which he or she is the product. Tom too symbolizes the dangerous consequences of the kind of education advocated by Gradgrind. But the most perfect achievement of Gradgrind's system of education is symbolized by Bitzer for whom everything becomes a matter of bargain and sale, and who is governed wholly by the principle of self-interest. Mrs. Sparsit is a symbol also. She represents the snobbery and the hypocrisy of the upper classes of that period. Likewise, James Harthouse symbolizes the decay which comes from rank without character.

The evil in the characters of this group. All the characters mentioned above, with the sole exception of Louisa, are made to appear not only ridiculous but stupid and hateful. We develop a strong dislike for them for their general lack of any human sympathy and for their narrowness of outlook. It is true that we forgive Gradgrind, partly for his having taken the abandoned Sissy under his protection and partly because towards the end he realises the enormity of his mistake and feels truly repentant. But his

conduct in having argued Louisa into marrying Bounderby; on purely utilitarian grounds and with the help of statistics, is an act for which he can make no amends. The damage that he does to Louisa is irreparable. As for Bounderby, he aggravates his utilitarian economic philosophy by his dishonesty in having fabricated the circumstances in which he grew up, and even more by his complete disregard of filial sentiments and his callous treatment of his mother. Mrs. Sparsit may well be described as a villain. She is odious to us because of her vanity and snobbery in constantly referring to her aristocratic background, and her hypocrisy in cringing to her employer in his presence and calling him a noodle when she is alone. She aggravates her faults by the manner in which she plays the spy, keeping a close watch on the movements and actions of Louisa, and later tracking Mrs. Pegler to her country cottage. James Harthouse's cynicism, his assumed honesty in dishonesty, his general boredom with life and his seeking distraction by pursuing Louisa in order to acquire her as a mistress—all these show him to be a despicable fellow. Tom's ingratitude towards the sister who lavished all her affection upon him and his losing of the sense of right and wrong thoroughly repel us, and we feel quite satisfied when he ultimately gets what he deserves.

Our feeling of hatred for the evils represented. These facts about *Hard Times* give it the quality of a moral fable. As we watch these various characters behaving in accordance with their natures and their upbringing, we are filled with an abhorrence for the kind of education that develops only the head and ignores the heart, and for the utilitarianism and laissez faire which encourage only the profit motive and which allow no room for sympathy with the workmen. We are filled with hatred for the selfishness, greed, snobbery, hypocrisy, hardness, cynicism, and inhumanity which these characters symbolize. A moral fable depicts evils and vices in such manner as to make the reader hate them. This novel succeeds in that purpose.

The nobility of Stephen and Rachel. Then there are the other characters who symbolize certain moral qualities which make us admire them. There are, first of all, Stephen and Rachel. They are both noble-minded and generous persons, Rachel even more than Stephen. Stephen may not join the workers' union, but he is a more sincere champion of their rights than the dishonest, crooked, and self-important Slackbridge with his pompous manner of speaking and his inflated rhetoric. Unable to get rid of a drunken wife, Stephen resorts to no brutal or crooked devices ; all he does is to call this life "a muddle". Rachel is truly a noble woman ; it is she who snatches the bottle of poison from the hands of Stephen's wife, thus saving the life of one whom she has every reason to detest. Indeed, as has been said by a critic, these two persons are too good to be true, even though Stephen's passivity, when his wife is about to drink poison, somewhat jars upon us because of its contrast with Rachel's prompt action.

Sissy's goodness and spirit of service. Sissy symbolizes vitality as well as goodness ; she is generous and she is full of the spirit of service ; she is the antithesis of calculating self-interest. The working of Sissy's influence in Gradgrind's utilitarian home is conveyed to us by Dickens with a fine tact. She not only attends upon Mrs. Gradgrind with devotion but she establishes a bond between herself and Gradgrind's youngest daughter, Jane. Her most conspicuous service to the family, however, is the manner in which she drives away Harthouse from Coketown and the manner in which she becomes the instrument of Tom's escape from the clutches of the law. Gradgrind is eventually saved through the one non-utilitarian act which he performed when he took Sissy under his protection at the outset. And this lesson is part of the moral fable in this novel.

The circus, a symbol of "humanity" as well as art. The circus is very important as a symbol in the scheme of this moral fable. The circus people symbolize not only art but also humanity : they are embodiments of those simple virtues of sympathy and helpfulness to others for which Gradgrind's philosophy has no use and Bounderby's hardened heart no room. There is a remarkable gentleness about these people, a special inaptitude for any kind of sharp practice, and an untiring readiness to help and pity one another. We greatly appreciate Mr. Sleary's action in helping Gradgrind by enabling Tom to escape from Bitzer's clutches. And we must not forget that Mr. Sleary performs this service because of his feeling of gratitude to Gradgrind for the latter's having properly looked after Sissy.

Gradgrind's heartless philosophy. So the two worlds confront each other in this novel—the world of generous feeling and the world of rationalized greed. It is through his heartless philosophy that Gradgrind is struck down, and through his inconsistent deed of kindness that he and his family are ultimately saved. Through his blindness to imagination, his failure to understand the life of the emotions. the mechanical crudity of his philosophy, his son Tom becomes a selfish sneak and thief ; and his daughter Louisa suffers a dark emptiness in her heart.

The supreme message of the novel. The moral of the novel as a whole is put by Dickens in the mouth of Mr. Sleary of the circus. After giving an account of the death of Sissy's father to Gradgrind, Mr. Sleary comes to the conclusion that there is a kind of love in the world which is not self-interest after all, but something very different, and that this love has a way of its own of calculating or not calculating. This is the supreme message which the novel has for us. In these few words we find a condemnation of all that Gradgrind, Bounderby, Harthouse, and Mrs. Sparsit symbolize, and an acceptance and approval of what Stephen and Rachel, Sissy, and Mr. Sleary himself, symbolize. There are, thus, strong grounds for calling this novel a moral fable or a morality

play, with the characters functioning partly as individuals but chiefly as symbols.

Description of Coketown. Coketown itself is treated as a symbol in the novel. This industrial town represents industrial ugliness. industrial callousness, the mechanical and monotonous life which the workmen or the "hands" are compelled to lead under a system governed by utilitarianism and laissez faire. All the passages which describe this town or its people are written in an ironical vein and have an obvious moral purpose.

Passages of direct moralizing. Finally, there are passages of direct moralizing which lend to the novel the character of a moral fable or morality play. At one point, for instance, Dickens warns the "commissioners of fact" and the utilitarian economists that if they do not attend to the instincts and emotions of the poor people, reality will take a wolfish turn and make an end of everything. At another point Dickens offers an ironic commentary, with an obvious moral, upon the effects of Gradgrind's system of education on Bitzer's outlook. And then, of course, there is the plain and straightforward moralizing in the final chapter when the author comments upon the ultimate fate of each of the characters.

Q. 7. Illustrate, and comment upon, Dickens's use of irony and satire in *Hard Times*.

Or

Write a critical note on Dickens's gifts of wit, humour, and satire as revealed in *Hard Times*.

Ans. Dickens's masterly use of irony; his capacity for sarcasm and ridicule. Dickens is one of the greatest humorists in English literature. In most of his novels humour generally arises from the oddities and eccentricities of character, and this humour is often tolerant, indulgent, and playful. In *Hard Times*, however, Dickens shows himself also as a great satirist, *Hard Times* is predominantly a satirical novel, and it shows in an abundant measure Dickens's masterly use of irony, his tremendous capacity for sarcasm, and his great powers of ridicule. We could even say that the greatest asset of this novel is its brilliant satire. although some of the critics are inclined to treat this novel more as a moral fable and as a grim book. It may be pointed out in this connection that satire generally has a moral and corrective purpose.

The targets of satire in this novel. Dickens's satire in this book is directed against certain evils, abuses, and false values of Victorian society. The targets of satire in this book are utilitarianism (in education, in business, in industry, and even in the taking of decisions regarding marriage), materialism, laissez faire, greed for money, class-distinctions, snobbery, hypocrisy, and trade-unionism. All these evils have been satirised in the persons of Gradgrind, Bounderby, Mrs. Sparsit, James Harthouse, Bitzer, Tom, and

Slackbridge. Even the people of Coketown collectively have been satirised.

Irony in the opening chapters. The very opening of the novel is satirical. We are introduced to Gradgrind who is explaining his utilitarian theory of education to the new schoolmaster, and is emphasizing the supreme importance of facts, and only facts. There is irony in the manner in which the writer describes Gradgrind's eyes, forehead, mouth, voice, hair, etc. lending emphasis to his statements regarding the importance of facts. There is irony also in the author's description of the pupils as *little vessels*, arranged in order, ready to receive gallons and gallons of facts until they are full to the brim. There is irony, again, in the description of Gradgrind as a man of realities, as a man of facts and calculations, as a man going about with the necessary instruments to weigh and measure "any parcel of human nature". There is irony in the questions that Gradgrind and the government officer put to the class and the answers that these two educational experts provide to illuminate the minds of their pupils. There is irony also in the manner in which the colourless boy, Bitzer, with his factual definition of a horse, is described. Then there is the new schoolmaster who is ironically described as one of the large batch of schoolmasters who were produced "at the same time, in the same factory, on the same principles, like so many pianoforte legs," and who has crammed a multitude of facts pertaining to most of the sciences and arts.

Gradgrind's educational system and his upbringing of his children satirized. The satire continues in the account of Gradgrind's mode of bringing up his own children and the kind of life that his children are made to lead at home. No little Gradgrind had ever seen a face in the moon. No little Gradgrind had ever learnt the silly jingle, "Twinkle, twinkle, little star ; how I wonder what you are". No little Gradgrind had heard the usual stories meant to appeal to the childish imagination. Gradgrind does not allow his children to exercise their fancy or to wonder at anything. Accordingly, the author ironically refers to Gradgrind's "metallurgical Louisa" and his "mathematical Thomas". The satire on Gradgrind's theory of education is reinforced by Dickens's portrayal of Mrs. Gradgrind who is always urging her children never to wonder at anything but to go and be "somethingological" directly. All this satire is, of course, very amusing. There is no question of any grimness here ; we genuinely enjoy the manner in which the author ridicules Gradgrind's system of education which includes addressing Cecilia Jupe not as "Sissy" and not even by her full name but as "girl number twenty."

Irony and satire in the scene when Bounderby's proposal is discussed. The interview between Gradgrind and his daughter when Bounderby's proposal of marriage is discussed has justly been regarded as "a triumph of ironic art." The author ridicules Gradgrind's statistical approach to the subject of marriage

between his young daughter Louisa and his elderly friend Bounderby. In this consummate scene, Louisa's irony in the answers she gives to her father's questions is completely lost upon the utilitarian Gradgrind. For instance, he completely fails to perceive the irony behind Louisa's statement that she knows nothing of tastes and fancies, or aspirations and affections, of all that part of her nature in which such things might have been nourished. The eminently practical parent fails to perceive the irony when Louisa says to him that he has trained her so well that she never dreamed a child's dream, and that he has dealt so wisely with her, from her cradle to this hour, that she never had a child's belief or a child's fear. Although we deeply sympathise with the unfortunate Louisa who is going to be sacrificed to Bounderby, yet the scene is essentially a satire on Gradgrind's general attitude to life.

Bounderby, a target of satire and ridicule. Bounderby is a target of even sharper satire. Apart from the satirical manner in which his physical appearance is described, his bragging of his humble birth is ridiculed by the author time and again. Bounderby is referred to as "the bully of humility". There is irony in the manner in which the author refers to Bounderby's baldness : one might have fancied that Bounderby had "talked off his hair," and that what remained of it was in a state of disorder, being constantly "blown about by his windy boastfulness." There is irony also in the author's account of how Bounderby not only sings his own praises but encourages other people to sing them. He is often referred to at meetings as the Royal Arms, the Union Jack, Magna Carta, John Bull, Habeas Corpus, the Bill of Rights, and so on. All this is certainly very amusing. Dickens ridicules this man also for the manner in which he prepares for his marriage with Louisa ; "The business was all facts, from first to last." Bounderby makes love to Louisa in the form of bracelets ; during the period of betrothal his love-making has "a manufacturing aspect." Dickens also ridicules this man's attitude towards his workmen, which is expressed in his view that the workers demand turtle soup and venison with a gold spoon. He is the object of ridicule when he says that the only improvement remaining to be carried out in the conditions of work is to spread Turkey carpets on the floors of the factories, when he refers to factory smoke as "meat and drink" and the healthiest thing in the world. Bounderby is also satirized for the way in which he deals with Stephen when the latter goes to seek his guidance with regard to his matrimonial troubles and when he tells Stephen that he married for better and for worse and that he should not complain or grumble. But the author's ridicule acquires the sharpest edge when Bounderby's stories relating to his infancy are found to be a complete fabrication. We thoroughly enjoy his discomfiture at this time : "He could not have looked a bully more shorn and forlorn if he had had his ears cropped."

Mrs. Sparsit ridiculed throughout. Then there is Mrs. Sparsit who is satirized for her snobbery, her hypocrisy, her deceit-

fulness, etc. As in the cases of Gradgrind and Bounderby, Dickens ridicules the very physical appearance of Mrs. Sparsit. He amuses us greatly by repeatedly referring to her Roman nose and Coriolanian eyebrows. We find her cringing to her employer Bounderby on whom she has become dependent after having fallen upon evil days, though she can still never forget her aristocratic background, and mentions her high connections at the slightest opportunity. We are greatly amused when we find her looking very dejected by what she considers to be the impiety of the common people as represented by Stephen's desire to divorce his wife. We are greatly amused by her weakness for sweetbread and by her references to her "annual compliment." The author makes fun of her also when he tells us that while she thought herself to be "the bank fairy," the townspeople regarded her as "the bank dragon" keeping watch over the bank treasure. But we are amused much more when we are told that, after speaking to Bounderby with the utmost humility and respect, she shakes her fist in private at Bounderby's portrait and calls him a noodle. Her hypocrisy is fully exposed here. There is irony in the manner in which the author describes how Mrs. Sparsit has imagined a staircase down which she sees Louisa falling step by step. The hot chase which Mrs. Sparsit gives to Louisa and her disappointment when she loses sight of her quarry is also satirically described. If Mrs. Sparsit had a Powler as her husband, she is herself a "prowler" about Bounderby's house, watching Louisa's movements like a hawk.

Bitzer's education and training satirized. Bitzer is the target of some very delicious satire. He is the best product of Gradgrind's model school. The author ironically describes Bitzer as having grown into an extremely clear-headed, cautious, prudent young man who is sure to rise in the world. Bitzer's mind is so exactly regulated that he has no affections or passions. When he refuses to let Tom go, he defends his action with reference to the theory of self-interest which he was taught in Gradgrind's school. There is supreme irony in this situation, and the author offers us an ironic commentary on Gradgrind's philosophy according to which everything was to be paid for and gratitude was to be abolished.

James Harthouse ridiculed. James Harthouse is another object of satire, though the satire in this case is rather of the serious kind. Harthouse has been recruited by the Gradgrind party, ironically called the "Hard Fact fellows," because this party needs assistance in cutting the throats of the Graces. Harthouse is ironically described as one of the "fine gentlemen"; he is bored with everything in life and he now enters the political sphere to find some diversion. The whole account of this man's strategy in his design of acquiring Louisa as a mistress is ironical. Luckily, he has himself a sense of humour and, when he has been cornered by Sissy who reveals her identity as merely a dependant in the Gradgrind home, he says to himself: "The defeat may now be considered perfectly accomplished." This would-be seducer is driven out of

Coketown by a circus clown's daughter, and he himself sees clearly the irony of the situation. The interview between Sissy and Harthouse is also one of the most enjoyable episodes, with the potential seducer seeing himself as a great pyramid of failure and thus seeing himself in a most ridiculous position, and consoling himself with his motto : "What will be, will be."

Satire on trade-unionism. Slackbridge is the trade union leader who is the target of some cruel satire. His inflated rhetoric and his exaggerated charges against Stephen depict him in a most unfavourable light. Critics have been disappointed with Dickens's portrayal of Slackbridge, but we in India know that many of our trade unions do have leaders of this kind, and so we can respond to the satire implied in these trade union scenes, cruel as the satire may be. Slackbridge addresses his audience as if he were the greatest patriot in the land, and as if he had come to address them as their only saviour against the greatest danger to their cause, namely Stephen who is in actual fact the most harmless man conceivable.

The scene of the parting between Bounderby and Mrs. Sparsit. There is a most amusing scene towards the end of the novel when Bounderby dismisses Mrs. Sparsit. There is a most enjoyable exchange of sarcastic remarks between these two persons who are otherwise most detestable. Here Mrs. Sparsit calls Bounderby a noodle to his face and sweeps out of his presence after looking most contemptuously at him from head to foot.

Mr. Slearly, a comic character. Mr. Sleary is a comic character who, in addition to his sheer goodness of heart, provides much fun, partly by his being always neither sober nor drunk and partly by his account of the manner in which his trained circus-horse and circus-dog help in Tom's escape from Bitzer's clutches. Mrs. Gradgrind too is a comic character, though she is also a pathetic creature.

Q. 8. "Of all Dickens's works *Hard Times* is the one that has all the strength of his genius." Discuss and illustrate.

Or

Would you say that *Hard Times* is a great novel ? Give reasons for your answer.

Ans. Disagreement among critics. Critical opinion of *Hard Times* shows a lot of disagreement. When this novel first appeared, Macaulay criticized it for what he called its "sullen socialism," while Ruskin gave it high praise as a social novel. In the twentieth century, G B. Shaw admired it for its marking Dickens's development into a conscious prophet ; but several other critics have found fault with the book. Paul Gray regards this book as a "limited success" though, at the same time, he describes it as an endlessly fascinating work. A.O.J. Cockshut thinks that

there are sound reasons against considering *Hard Times* a masterpiece, but even he regards it as a "work of great distinction." According to Chesterton, *Hard Times* is not one of the greatest books of Dickens, but it is perhaps in a sense "one of his greatest monuments." F.R. Leavis, however, regards it as having the distinctive strength that makes Dickens a major artist, and thinks that, in its originality, *Hard Times* is a triumphantly successful work of art.

Substance in most of the charges against this novel. *Hard Times* is, indeed, a work of genius. That does not mean that it represents perfection. Critics have pointed out several faults in it, and there is much substance in some of the criticisms. According to Dingle Foot, this novel offers us not living characters, but puppets. Chesterton thinks that the characters are "not only exaggerated but bitterly and deliberately exaggerated." The trade union scenes, and especially the portrayal of Slackbridge, have been thought most unsatisfactory by almost all the critics, F.R. Leavis not excluded. Fault has been found even with the manner in which Stephen has been portrayed. According to one critic, the novel sometimes gives the effect of choppy episodes, of undeveloped contrasts, of unfinished business, in short, of a narrative insufficiency. And then, of course there is the charge that Dickens does not give us enough psychology, that he does not take us into the minds of the characters.

Compact novel with a tightly organized structure. An impartial approach to this novel would reveal striking merits in it. It is a wonderfully compact book, free from superfluities, miscellaneous matter, padding for its own sake, humorous scenes which are not strictly relevant to the plot, in fact, all those faults which mar the structure of most of Dickens's novels, and even of *Great Expectations*. There are three plot-sequences in the novel, one centring round Thomas Gradgrind and his family including Sissy, the second centring round Josiah Bounderby, and the third relating to Stephen Blackpool and Rachel. These three sequences are closely interwoven, and we do not get the feeling that anything has been thrust upon the plot. Both James Harthouse and Mrs. Sparsit are essential to the plot, as is Bitzer, and as are the people of the circus, especially the circus-owner. No character has been introduced just for the sake of representing some oddity or eccentricity. Nor are there any unnecessary sub-plots introduced merely to add to the complications of the story. Indeed, the structure of this novel and its plot-construction, despite some flaws, do credit to Dickens.

The themes of the novel and their concrete presentation. *Hard Times* is a social novel with a well-defined theme. It is an indictment of Victorian society in general and some of its evils and abuses in particular. The main targets of attack in the book are : the utilitarian theory of education which was based on facts, figures, and calculations and which ignored the instincts and affections of the pupils ; utilitarianism in business and industry ;

laissez faire ; industrial ugliness ; labour-capital conflicts ; trade-unionism ; and the rigidity of divorce laws. Barring only a few direct comments on these matters by the author, there are no abstract discussions at all of the various issues involved. The attacks on the various evils take a concrete shape. For instance, the attack on the utilitarian theory of education is made through a couple of class-room scenes in which certain questions are asked and answers given to convey to us the absurdity of the system being followed. The disastrous results of such a system of education are seen in a concrete form in the failure of Louisa's marriage and in Tom's becoming a gambler and bank-robber. Similarly, the rigidity of divorce laws is conveyed to us through the misery which Stephen has to endure in his married life, and which he cannot get rid of in any way, even though there is another woman who can bring happiness into his life if he could divorce his wife. Industrial ugliness is conveyed to us through a few scattered but graphic descriptions of Coketown. Slackbridge's success in getting Stephen ostracised through his inflated rhetoric is intended to convey the excesses of trade-unionism, even though Dickens's treatment of this subject is most unfair and grossly exaggerated. All the themes dealt with in the novel are fully integrated with its structure.

Successful character-portrayal ; some unforgettable characters. The characters have successfully been portrayed, whatever some critics have to say against the portrayal. It is true that most of the characters are embodiments of certain concepts and ideas, and that most of them have a symbolic function. But they cannot be regarded as Jonsonian characters personifying different "humours"; each is individualised and differentiated from the others, and each strikes us as a real human being. Gradgrind certainly represents the utilitarian theory of education ; but this "eminently practical man" has a human touch in him. In spite of his absurd emphasis on facts, and his opposition to the exercise of the fancy and of the affections and emotions, this man takes Sissy under his protection. And, though he quotes statistics in order to prevail upon Louisa to marry the much older Bounderby, yet subsequently he realises, to the fullest possible extent, the enormity of his blunder in having ignored the importance of the "heart" as distinguished from the "head". Josiah Bounderby of Coketown is a personification of utilitarianism in his business and in his dealings with his workmen. Even the minimum requirements of his workmen are described by this man as a demand for turtle soup and venison with a gold spoon. Ruskin said that Bounderby had been overdrawn and that he was a dramatic monster. But we feel inclined to agree with the critic who regards Bounderby as a convincing character by pointing out that England is full of Bounderbys. This man has his individual traits also; he is "the bully of humility," boasting constantly of his humble origin, and exalting at the same time the aristocratic connections of his housekeeper, Mrs. Sparsit. Mrs. Sparsit herself, with her Roman nose and Coriolanian eyebrows, is a triumph of characterisation, villainous as she is. She

symbolises the vanity and hypocrisy of the aristocratic class, but in her secret ambition to get married to Bounderby, her jealousy of Louisa, her spying upon Harthouse's amorous advances to Louisa, her great capacity for sarcasm and her composure on all occasions (she breaks down only once when it is found that Louisa has not eloped after all)—these are all individual traits. As for Louisa, she is no symbol; she is a completely individual character, though somewhat unusual in her great reserve, and though Dickens tells us nothing at all of what goes on in her mind. Sissy, likewise, is an individual character and is not to be regarded as merely a personification of goodness and gentleness. Rachel belongs to the same category as Sissy. Character-portrayal in this novel has certainly its deficiencies, but it is by no means a failure : in fact, Gradgrind, Bounderby, and Mrs. Sparsit are unforgettable characters. Nor must we forget Mr. Sleary, who provides not only an abundance of comedy by his copious and lisping manner of talk but also the moral of the whole story. According to Mr. Sleary, there is a love in the world, not of self-interest after all, and this love has it own way of calculating or not calculating. Mrs. Sleary offers also a justification for the existence of the circus : people cannot be all the time reading or working ; they need to be amused.

Satirical wit. One of the most striking merits of this novel is its satirical wit. All the characters, with the exception of Stephen, Rachel, and Sissy, have satirically been portrayed. For instance, Grandgrind, we are told, goes about with a rule, a pair of scales and the multiplication table always in his pocket, ready to weigh and measure any parcel of human nature. Bounderby has invented a myth that he was abandoned as an infant by his mother and left to the charge of an irresponsible, drunken grandmother. Mrs. Sparsit cringes to Bounderby in his presence, but shakes her fist at his portrait and calls him a noodle when she is alone. (When she is dismissed, she calls him a noodle to his face). Similarly, Harthouse's "assumed honesty in dishonesty," his cynicism and boredom, the passionless manner in which he pursues his plan for the seduction of Louisa, are all ridiculed by Dickens. Slackbridge, with his extravagant oratory, his wickedness, and his unreasoning hostility towards Stephen is perhaps the victim of the cruellest satire in the book, even though we may object to this portryal on grounds of realism.

Great scenes in the novel. *Hard Times* is certainly not a novel providing popular entertainment. It is a highly intellectual novel which can be enjoyed by the discerning reader who does not mind exerting himself mentally. This novel does not have the usual, elaborate kind of plot, with a plenty of melodramatic and sensational incidents, which we usually find in Dickens's novels. But even this novel has its great scenes : dramatic scenes, moving scenes, and delectable comedy. The opening class-room scenes, the discussion between Gradgrind and his daughter over Bounderby's proposal of marriage, Mrs. Sparsit's chase of Louisa and her feeling of disappointment at the end, the arrival of Louisa at her father's

home in a miserable state, Sissy's interview with Harthouse, and the final exchanges of sarcastic remarks between Bounderby and Mrs. Sparsit—these are the highlights of the book, and they could have come only from an author of genius.

Leavis's praise of this novel. The praise which Leavis gives to this novel is therefore largely justified. According to Leavis, Dickens's creative exuberance is, in this novel, controlled by a profound inspiration that informs, directs, and limits. In this novel, Dickens unmistakably shows a comprehensive vision, and renders that vision in a wonderfully skilful manner. Dickens's art of narration in this novel shows a lot of flexibility ; his ironic method combines with different other methods to produce a truly dramatic and profoundly poetic whole. Sissy Jupe is not merely a conventional person ; she is part of the poetically-creative operation of Dickens's genius. Leavis also points out that this book cannot be accused of giving a misleading representation of human nature. The psychology of Louisa's development and of her brother Tom is sound. The confutation of utilitarianism by life is conducted in the story with great subtlety. The astonishing and irresistible richness of life characterizes the book everywhere. It meets us everywhere in the prose. Dickens writes not poetic prose, but he writes with a poetic force of evocation. *Hard Times* affects us as a book belonging with formally poetic works. It suggests that the genius of its author is that of a poetic dramatist.

Commenting on this novel, a discerning critic* says that *Hard Times* has an extraordinary cast of characters for such a short novel : the whelp, who fails as a man and a brother ; Mrs. Gradgrind whose death-bed scene is a marvellous blend of high humour and high tragedy ; Harthouse, the bland politician of the future ; Mrs. Pegler, whose surprising revelation is equalled by her eccentricities ; and Rachel, who knows how to love a good man. All these persons fit into the intricate scheme of the novel ; they all illustrate aspects of commercial Coketown ; and they all exist as functioning individuals.

Q. 9. "*Hard Times* is Dickens's most conspicuous failure". Elucidate and discuss.

Or

What, in your opinion, are the weaknesses and shortcomings of *Hard Times* as a novel ?

Ans. A great work of art. To call *Hard Times* a conspicuous failure would be to make a sweeping generalisation unwarranted by the facts of the case. This novel certainly has its imperfections and its shortcomings, but to call it a conspicuous failure is to take up an extreme position for which there is no justification, especially because the novel has outstanding merits. It would be unsound criticism to magnify the weaknesses of this novel to the extent of denying to it its legitimate rank as a work of art.

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*Charles Shapiro.

The alleged faults of this novel, according to one critic. Critics have by no means been reluctant or hesitant in pointing out what they consider to be the weaknesses of this novel. Earle Davis thinks that it is something less than a great novel for several reasons. It was not meticulously planned ; it was written somewhat hurriedly to fill a blank in the schedule of the weekly magazine in which it appeared in a serial form ; the author had inadequate space for developing his contrasting plot-sequences ; he also had difficulty in focusing all his narrative technical resources on his subject, so that the novel does not make use of the author's best devices. As a result of these factors, *Hard Times* sometimes gives us the effect of choppy episodes, of undeveloped contrasts, of unfinished business ; and this kind of effect is not exactly characteristic of Dickens's last period of creation.

Faults according to another critic. *Hard Times* has also been dismissed as a tract against scientific and pragmatic education, and as a socio-economic pamphlet the proper place for which is with the propagandist literature of Carlyle and Ruskin. A.O.J. Cockshut is of the opinion that the portrayal of Gradgrind does not harmonize with the manner in which the characters of Bounderby and James Harthouse have been presented. This critic feels uneasy whenever Gradgrind in the course of the story has any dealings with Bounderby and Harthouse. Cockshut also finds the parallel between Bounderby's and Stephen Blackpool's matrimonial troubles to be unconvincing ; in this case probability, psychology, and everything else seem to have been sacrificed to symmetry. The last chapter, says Cockshut, summarises in a few hundred words events which might fill a whole novel. Here Dickens's sense of superiority of life to "fact", which is the guiding-star of the novel up to this point, seems ironically to have deserted him. Gradgrind could almost have written the chapter himself. Cockshut also finds fault with the manner in which Mr. Sleary is sought to be presented as a moral positive in the novel. It would be wrong, says this critic, to regard Mr. Sleary as a genius and to put him in the same company as the Fool in Shakespeare's play *King Lear*. In spite of this, Cockshut has no hesitation in saying that *Hard Times* is a work of great distinction, though not a masterpiece.

Unconvincing characters ; a set of puppets. Perhaps the sharpest criticism of this novel comes from Dingle Foot who finds most of the characters in it to be unconvincing. In writing this novel, says Dingle Foot, Dickens was working in an unfamiliar milieu ; and that is the reason why Dickens, who is the greatest master of English character since Shakespeare, has in this book presented us with a set of puppets. Almost all the characters in this novel show an anaemic quality ; with the exception of Mr. Bounderby, they are a strangely bloodless lot. Dingle Foot finds it hard to believe even in Sissy Jupe or in any member of the Gradgrind family. Gradgrind, Louisa, Tom—they are all of them incredible, just as incredible as Sissy's conversation with Harthouse at

his hotel when she prevails on him to leave Coketown for ever. In Dingle Foot's opinion, the book is saved by only two characters, namely Mr. Bounderby and Mrs. Sparsit.

The unsatisfactory portrayal of Stephen Blackpool. Dingle Foot also feels dissatisfied with the portrayal of Stephen Blackpool whom he regards as one of the less successful characters in Dickens. There have always been cases in which a man is sent to Coventry by his fellow workers because of some real or imaginary offence committed by him against their code of discipline. Perhaps every industrial community has some independent spirit who, for whatever reason refuses to conform. The defect in this novel is that we are given no indication as to why it was that Stephen Blackpool refused to join the union. Stephen is denounced by Slackbridge as one who has betrayed the workers' cause, as "a traitor and a craven and a recreant." The workers, it appears, are divided and some of the members insist that the person so described be given a chance to explain his position. The chairman shares this view and it is at this point that the reader learns that this stubborn non-conformist is none other than the tragic Stephen. Stephen declares that he is the one single hand in Mr. Bounderby's mill who cannot conform to the proposed regulations of the workers' union. Dickens makes no attempt to inform us as to what the regulations are. Stephen goes on to state that he has his reasons, though he gives no reasons. Later, when interrogated by Mr. Bounderby, Stephen states that he has given a promise not to join the union. We are left to speculate as to what the promise can possibly have been. Here again, says Dingle Foot, the picture is an unreal one. It is far more likely that a man of Stephen's character would himself have been a prominent member of the workers' union. In real life he would probably have been dismissed by his employer for his trade union activities. Such a thing does not happen in the novel because of Dickens's obvious hostility to trade union organisers. In *Hard Times* it is assumed that any such outspoken and extremist demagogue cannot be tolerated.

The portrayal of Slackbridge. Slackbridge is described by Dickens as an ill-made man who was above his co-workers in very little but the stage on which he stood, and who was in many great respects essentially below them. Slackbridge was "not so honest, not so manly, not so good humoured" as the majority of his co-workers; he substituted cunning for their simplicity, and passion for their safe solid sense. In short, Dickens makes this trade union leader a thoroughly detestable person not only through his description of the man but through the way the man speaks to his audience about Stephen. Such a portrayal of a trade union leader is, according to most of the critics, unrealistic and unconvincing; it is, in fact, outrageously contrary to facts. As for Stephen, he subsequently explains to Mr. Bounderby at great length the grievances of the workers. But it is made abundantly clear by Dickens that Stephen has no use either for Slackbridge or for any other trade union leader.

Dickens's unsatisfactory approach to workers' problems. The question naturally arises what Dickens would suggest as the alternative to trade unions. How are the problems of industrial working class to be remedied ? The answer seems to Dickens very simple. The employers must learn to treat their workers with kindness and patience, and they must never forget that working people also have their loves and memories and inclinations and human feelings. It is really puzzling how Dickens could arrive at such a conclusion. How could an intellectual genius like Dickens fail to see that only by organisation could the working people of Coketown ever hope to face employers like Bounderby or bring about some improvement in their conditions of life. Dickens is content with merely preaching Christian charity to a class of employers who, according to Dickens himself, were only concerned to pay the least possible wages and had not the slightest interest in the welfare of the workers.

Sentimentality ; melodrama ; flimsy motivation. David Craig also expresses his dissatisfaction with some aspects of *Hard Times*. The portrayal of Stephen Blackpool seems to this critic to be a mixture of sentimentality and melodrama. Stephen is not regarded by this critic as an acceptable representative of factory workers. Both Stephen and Rachel appear to him too good to be true : the sufferings of these two characters have been exploited by the author for maudlin purposes. Giving Stephen a monstrous drunken wife is in keeping with the Victorian way of depicting the hero or the heroine as a martyr. But the special effect in this novel is to isolate Stephen as much as possible from his co-workers, a justification which is so flimsily motivated as to be totally unconvincing. David Craig also supports the view that the portrayal of Slackbridge is most unsatisfactory. According to this critic, the part of the novel dealing with all these three characters is peculiarly shaky ; the upshot of this part of the novel is to imply that working class militancy and working-class decency cannot go together.

Dickens's limitations, according to Leavis. On the subject of Dickens's treatment of the trade union theme, even F.R. Leavis joins the general chorus of criticism. Leavis thinks that, when Dickens comes to the trade unions, his understanding betrays a marked limitation. Dickens was wrong in giving the representative role to an agitator like Slackbridge, or to portray Slackbridge in the manner in which Dickens has portrayed him. The martyrdom of the good working man represented by Stephen also seems unjustified to Leavis. Nor does Leavis agree with Dickens in the latter's condemnation of the British Parliament as the national dust-yard where the national dust-men entertain one another with a great many noisy fights among themselves.

No development in the characters. Dingle Foot has something more to say against *Hard Times*. The characters in he novelt sof Dickens never develop (with the exception of the autobio-

graphical novel *David Copperfield* and another novel, *Great Expectations*). Dickens's characters are fully formed from the beginning. The comic characters in Dickens always remain comic except for the occasional moment when they are allowed to relapse into pathos. All this is apparent in *Hard Times*, except that, with the single exception of Mr. Sleary, there are no comic characters. Bounderby marries the reluctant Louisa, and neither of them changes in the slightest degree. Bounderby does not in the least soften ; his habits do not undergo the least alteration, even under the influence of his wife. As for the wife, she remains cold and proud, and never utters a single word of protest to her husband. She remains throughout the same disdainful creature that she appears at the beginning of the story.

The flaw in the portrayal of Mrs. Sparsit. Dingle Foot objects to the portrayal of Mrs. Sparsit also. She is depicted as a completely evil character in the book. But it never occurs to Dickens that she could be a pathetic figure. She could be regarded as a representative of all widowed gentlewomen in reduced circumstances whose time is divided between regrets for the vanished past and a malicious observation of the persent. Dingle Foot goes on to observe that, having to work with unchangeable characters, Dickens is very little concerned with human psychology.

Bounderby, hard to believe. The portrayal of Bounderby has also been objected to by some critics. Even Ruskin, who otherwise praised this novel, said that Bounderby was a dramatic monster and highly improbable.

The merits of this novel. Such, then, are the weaknesses and shortcomings of this novel in the eyes of the critics. But some of even these critics recognise the great merits of this book. For instance, Dingle Foot praises Dickens's descriptions in this novel of industrial Coketown with all its ugliness and monotony of life. Says this critic : "So in *Hard Times* the interest lies not in the plot but in the picture of Coketown." But it is F.R. Leavis who finds in this novel convincing evidence of Dickens's genius. According to Leavis, of all Dickens's works *Hard Times* is the one that has the distinctive strength that makes Dickens a major artist ; he regards it as a triumphantly successful work of art. Leavis admires Dickens's rich and complex mode of writing in this novel, his sound representation of human nature, his flexibility, his comprehensive vision. He also praises Dickens's style : Dickens does not write poetic prose : he writes with a poetic force of evocation. The genius of Dickens in this novel may be fairly described as that of a poetic dramatist. To all this we may add that the real brilliance of *Hard Times* lies in its devastating irony and its sharp and pungent satire by means of which Dickens exposes the absurdity of utilitarianism in education, business, and industry, and of the theory of laissez faire which allows the factory owners to exploit the workers. *Hard Times* is a great social novel which ridicules also such vices as snobbery, class-distinctions, hypocrisy, deceit, fraud, etc. Finally, it has a well-knit structure.

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